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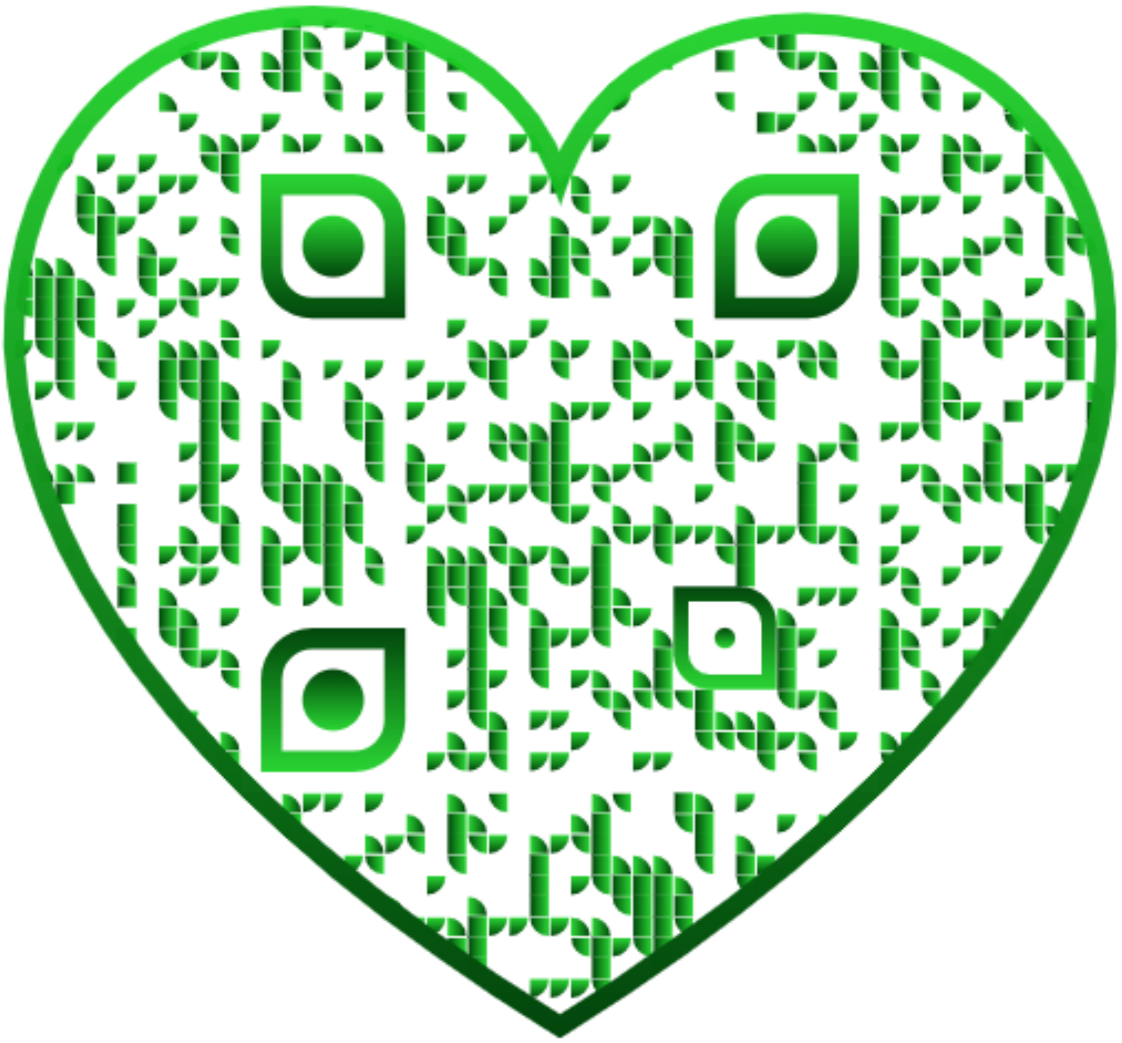

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GUITAR LEGENDS

SUMMER 2004 • #71

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MARK WEISS

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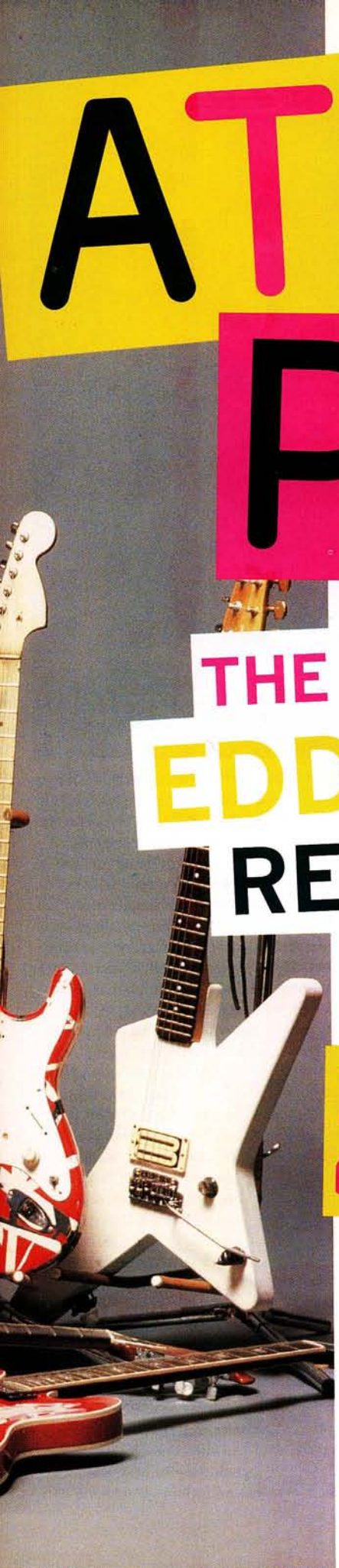
MARK WEISS

ATOMIC PUNK

THE STORY OF HOW EDDIE VAN HALEN REVOLUTIONIZED ROCK GUITAR.

BY DAN AMRICH



Some sounds are unmistakable. Some are undefinable. More often than not, Van Halen is both.

Now, 25 years after catching the world's ear and shaking it violently, the aftershocks of Edward Van Halen's explosive guitar technique, radical ideas and boundless energy are still being felt. Surviving disco, punk, power pop, grunge and countless other trends, Eddie has proven himself as the ultimate—if somewhat reluctant—rock guitar hero.

Edward Lodewijk Van Halen was born on January 26, 1957, in Nijmegen, Holland. He and his elder brother Alex moved with their musician parents to Pasadena, California, when he was 10 years old. The family had 15 dollars and a piano, and what little of the former the family had went into teaching the children how to play the latter. But while Eddie respected the instrument, learned a lot about music in general and won numerous awards for his keyboard prowess, his heart wasn't in it. "Who wanted to sit at the piano?" he later said. "I wanted to go crazy!"

As American teens, Alex and Eddie learned both the English language and the language of rock and roll. Eddie invested in drums and Alex got a nylon-string acoustic guitar; while Eddie was busy delivering papers to pay for his kit, Alex was busy using it. Once Alex mastered "Wipeout," Eddie told Alex to keep the drums; he'd take the guitar. Both parties were happy. As Alex later recalled, "I could tell by the way he was moving his fingers around that he could do things I'd never be able to do, no matter how hard I practiced."

from left: David Lee Roth, Michael Anthony, Alex Van Halen and Eddie Van Halen, 1978

What he did with that guitar ultimately changed the face of rock, but in the early days, it was essentially just a case of jamming with his brother (using a Tiesco Del Rey electric guitar from Sears) and listening to a lot of early Beatles, Dave Clark Five, Hendrix, Page and especially Eric Clapton, whose licks he learned note for note. Eventually, Eddie and Alex played covers at high school events with an endless stream of temporary bassists, renting Roth's equipment occasionally, and Roth's dad let them practice in the basement. The fact that Roth's extroverted antics garnered the band a lot of attention didn't hurt. When Michael Anthony gave up his own band, Snake, to play bass for Mammoth in 1974, the group became the hottest ticket in Pasadena. It wasn't too long after that they realized that Mammoth was the name of another band in the area, so Roth suggested

"THEY BLEW US OFF THE STAGE EVERY NIGHT."
—OZZY OSBOURNE

under the name Mammoth—"a junior Cream," said Eddie. Yet the more he played, the more he realized he wanted to take his playing to the next level, beyond mere mimicry and into innovation.

But before anyone could hear Eddie's ideas, some basic problems had to be solved: primarily, finding a place to practice and finding cash to pay for a P.A. system during live gigs. Both were solved when David Lee Roth joined the band; the Van Halens had been they be known as simply Van Halen. "It had power to it," he said. Nobody could come up with anything better, so it stuck.

Playing mostly covers for five hours a night at various Southern California clubs, Eddie's technique inevitably mutated and, before long, local guitarists were heading to shows to check out his raw sound, homemade guitars and unorthodox technique of using two hands on the fretboard. Eddie, meanwhile, took his brother's advice and played solos with his back to the audience, so nobody could rip him off. As time wore on, the band got better gigs, working at legendary L.A. clubs like the Whisky and the Starwood, added more and more original material and, in 1977, caught the ear of Kiss bassist Gene Simmons. Simmons was impressed from note one and helped the band—then calling itself Daddy Longlegs—record a professional demo which was promptly rejected by every major label. It wasn't until Warner Bros. producer Ted Templeman personally convinced the label's president, Mo Ostin, to go see a VH show that the band got signed.

In February 1978, Van Halen's Templeman-produced, self-titled first album was released. An unholy wail of car horns assaulted listeners as "Running with the Devil" kicked off the record, but it was merely a warning shot; the following track, "Eruption," was nothing less than pure rock guitar revolution. Pinch harmonics, hammer-ons, two-handed tapping, whammy bar dives so deep they'll give you the bends—all in one terrifying package. As the guitar world scratched its collective head and tried to figure out what the hell had just happened, Edward Van Halen had altered the very perception of what rock guitar was—in one minute, 42 seconds flat.

On the combined strengths of "Runnin' with the Devil," a high-octane cover of the Kinks' "You Really Got Me" and Ed's jaw-dropping calisthenics, *Van Halen* cracked the Top 20 and sold two million copies in a matter of months. Opening nationwide tours for acts like Montrose and Journey, the band

NEIL ZLOZOWER (THIS PAGE AND PREVIOUS SPREAD)

quickly cemented a backstage reputation of babes, booze and bad behavior, spearheaded in no small part by Roth. Onstage, however, Van Halen was all business, pounding out adrenaline-soaked half-hour sets to stunned audiences. By the time they opened for Black Sabbath in Europe, the changing of the heavy rock guard was evident. "They blew us off the stage every night," recalled Ozzy Osbourne. "It was so embarrassing. We didn't have the fire anymore. They kicked our asses, but it convinced me of two things: my days with Black Sabbath were over, and Van Halen was going to be a very successful band."

By that December, the band had recorded a second album, cleverly titled *Van Halen II*. "Dance the Night Away" hit number 15, holding its own against the disco fare of the time and, by June 1979, the band was the headline act of a U.K. tour, with 22 tons of equipment in tow. Songs like "Beautiful Girls" helped solidify David Lee Roth's party persona, while the nylon-string solo "Spanish Fly" was Eddie's proof that daring moves need not be performed on an electric.

By 1980, Van Halen had helped fuel a heavy metal resurgence—though Eddie was uncomfortable with the phrase "heavy metal" to characterize the band. David Lee Roth, meanwhile, described Van Halen's music as "a cross between religion and hockey." Still, the group's third album, *Women and Children First*, oozed distorted riffs and thundering drums, ultimately hitting number nine on the *Billboard* album chart. It also contained decidedly non-metallic gems like the acoustic slide number "Could This Be Magic?" previous to which Eddie had never played slide guitar.

While on that year's "Invasion" tour, Eddie met TV actress Valerie Bertinelli and their romance blossomed quickly; the two were married in April 1981. It's ironic, then, that in the wake of one of Eddie's happiest moments, the band released its darkest album, *Fair Warning*. Creepy synth-driven pieces like "Sunday Afternoon in the Park" and the sordid subject matter of "Mean Street" and "Dirty Movies" ultimately overshadowed party rockers like "Unchained" and "So This Is Love?" But despite Warner Bros.' decision to not release a single, the album still charted higher than any of its predecessors, reaching Number Six.

Bending to record company pressures, the band recorded their fifth album, *Diver Down*, in 12 days to meet an April 1982 release date. The record clocked in at under 30 minutes and contained five cover tunes within its 12 tracks, a fact that didn't sit well with Eddie. "That's my least favorite record," he said later. "I'd rather bomb with my own songs than make it with someone else's." Still, the album isn't without its gems, particularly the volume-knob trickery of "Cathedral," the Spanish-style intro to "Little Guitars" and the guest appearance of Eddie and Alex's dad, Jan Van Halen, playing clarinet on "Big Bad Bill (Is Sweet William Now)." Warner Bros. was no doubt happy, as the album soared to number three and the "Hide Your Sheep" tour kicked off at the mammoth 1982 US Festival in California.

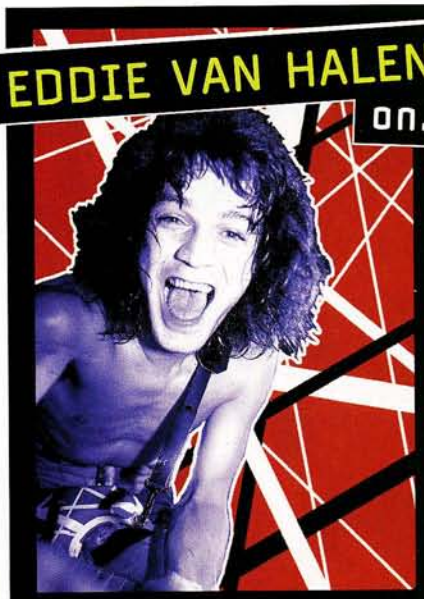
But the tour was short and Eddie found himself with some welcome downtime at home. Unexpectedly, producer Quincy Jones called up and asked Eddie to contribute a solo to a new song for Michael Jackson's upcoming album, *Thriller*. It was generally frowned upon for Van Halen members to work outside of the band (although Eddie had previously contributed to Nicolette Larson's *Nicolette* and Brian May's *Star Fleet Project*), but since his bandmates were all out on various vacations, Eddie agreed. After requesting a different section of the song to solo over, Ed cut two takes in 20 minutes. "Beat It" spent three weeks at number one and, largely due to Eddie's solo, crossed over to radio stations that normally wouldn't play r&b artists. *Thriller* went on to be the biggest-selling album of all time; Eddie, meanwhile, received a thank-you note and no payment, having done the solo as a favor.

While Roth later sniffed that "I ain't heard anything different," the "Beat It" favor was ultimately returned by listeners when *1984* was released on New Year's Eve, 1983. The leadoff single, "Jump," hit number one in late February and stayed there for five weeks. The fact that the guitar god's biggest hit was driven by a synthesizer hook seemed to bother everyone but Eddie; to him, it was just music. After all, the guy *did* have a classical piano background. Besides, the guitar faithful were rewarded with *1984*'s "Panama," "Top Jimmy" and the raucous "Hot for Teacher."

But widespread pop success came with a price. While David Lee Roth lapped up the attention, Eddie was thinking ahead to the next record. Roth had always preferred life on the road to life in a soundbooth and eventually their personal and work ethic differences came to a head. Roth had tasted solo success with his *Crazy from the Heat* album and, by June 1985, announced he was leaving the band. Ted Templeman went with him, leaving the producing duties to longtime engineer Donn Landee and the increasingly involved Eddie.

As a replacement for the acrimoniously departed Roth, the band consid-

EDDIE VAN HALEN on...



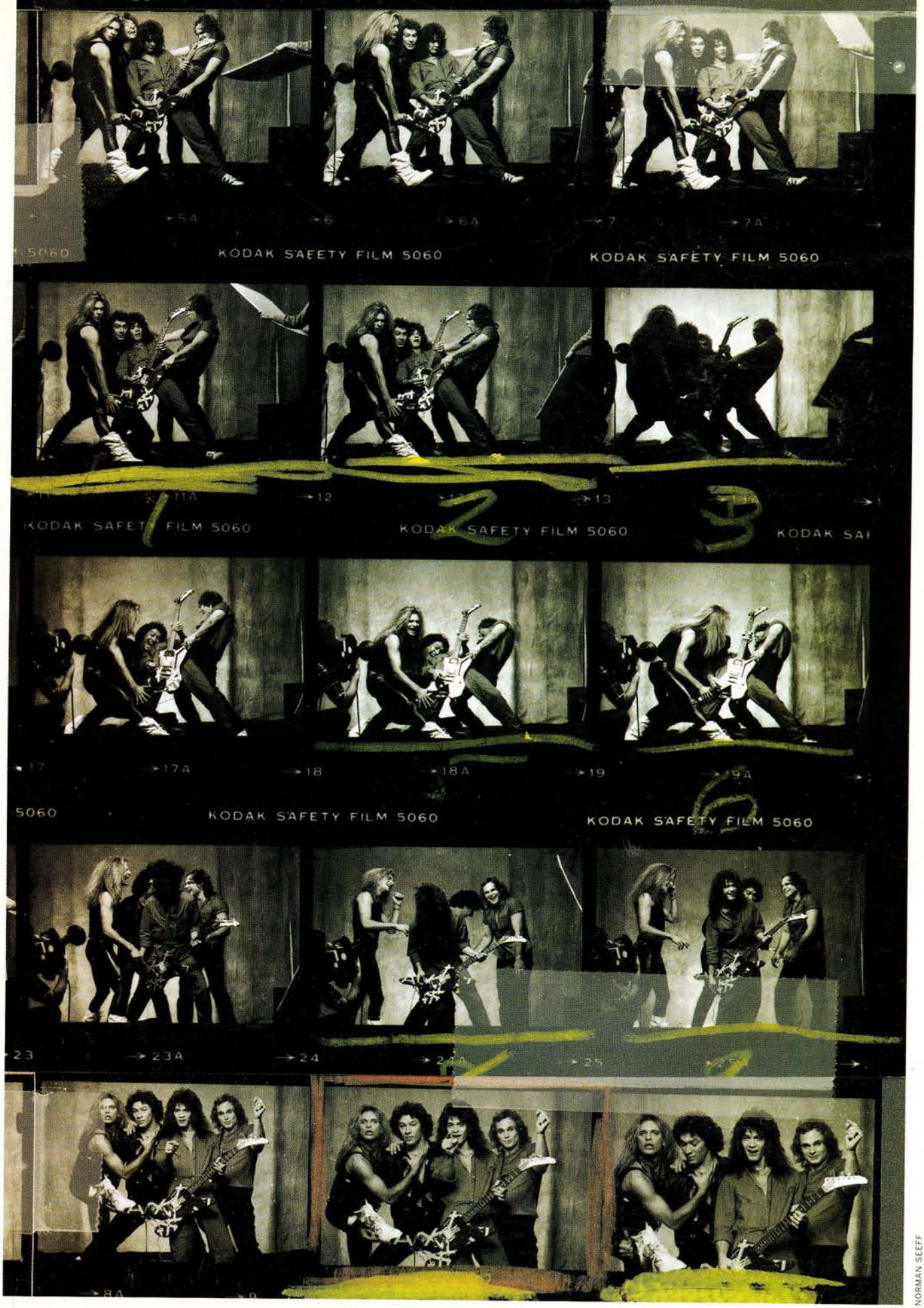
"ERUPTION" (VAN HALEN)

"It was originally just a guitar solo I performed regularly in our club days. When we were recording our first album, our producer, Ted Templeman, heard me practicing it for an upcoming gig and asked, 'What the hell is that?' I said, 'It's a thing I do live—it's my guitar solo.' His immediate reaction was, 'Shit, roll tape!' And I said, 'Whatever you say, Mr. Templeman.' We did it twice and that was it. Actually, when I get up high on the neck I make a mistake, but what the hell? It was the first record I did in my life, and I didn't know I could say, 'Hey, can I try it again?' "

"AIN'T TALKIN' 'BOUT LOVE" (VAN HALEN)

"It started as a punk rock parody. I just started slamming on two chords—A minor and G—and we were having a gas! Then I said, 'Wait a minute, we can really make something out of this.' "

MARK WEISS (TOP RIGHT); NEIL ZLOZOWER (BOTTOM LEFT)



NORMAN SEEFF

Gary Cherone (left) and EVH

ered doing the next album with a different lead singer on every track, but abandoned the idea after auditioning Sammy Hagar, ex-Montrose vocalist and solo artist in his own right. Hagar's fresh energy and more agreeable personality fueled 1986's *5150*, produced by Landee, the band and Mick Jones. Despite open skepticism over the missing Roth, the album became the band's first Number One record, spawning two keyboard-heavy hits, "Why Can't This Be Love?" and "Dreams" as well as strong guitar rockers like "Best of Both Worlds" and some wild Steinberger antics on "Get Up." Eddie later referred to it as "a very inspired record" with "a lot of soul."

Two years of vacation later, the band headlined the Monsters of Rock tour in the summer of 1988, playing all-day concerts alongside Metallica and the Scorpions, and released the second Hagar-fronted record, *OU812*, in June. With fans eager for new material, it captured the top spot on the album charts in under a month, sitting there for four weeks. "When It's Love," "Finish What Ya Started" and "Feels So Good" all enjoyed heavy radio airplay.

After the grueling tour, the band enjoyed some well-earned R&R. In 1990, the band opened their own club, the Cabo Wabo Cantina, in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico. The next year, on March 16, 1991, Eddie and Valerie gave birth to their first son, Wolfgang William Van Halen. With another partner, Eddie soon gave birth to another child: the Ernie Ball Music Man guitar he helped design. For a tinkerer like Eddie, creating a production instrument was the ultimate thrill. "I used to endorse the guitar I played," he said, "but I designed this one. It's a whole different ballgame."

Following closely behind the new ax came a new Andy Johns–produced album, *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*, in June 1991. The lead single, "Poundcake," continued Ed's tradition of making weird noises with guitars thanks to its electric drill opening hook while "Top of the World" picks up where "Jump" left off—literally, as it uses the "Jump" outro as its opening riff. Although the piano-based "Right Now" turned into a huge hit, the album seemed more guitar-oriented than recent efforts, staying at the number one spot on the album charts for three weeks.

Although Eddie had said in 1985 that he "didn't see the purpose" of a live album, he eventually changed his mind for *Right Here, Right Now*, released in February 1993. The band's first two-CD set featured material from the latest tour, a bass solo, a drum solo, lots of stage chatter from Hagar and a live solo by Eddie that encompasses "Eruption," "Cathedral," "316" and countless wild squeals. The album also featured Eddie's new Peavey 5150 amplifiers.

By the end of 1994, Eddie had severed his ties with Music Man, opting instead to evolve his earlier design for his amp manufacturer as the Peavey Wolfgang. More importantly, Eddie had stopped drinking and found that writing was far easier when he was sober. The appropriately named *Balance* debuted in January of the following year, ranging from the commercially poppy "Can't Stop Lovin' You" to the power boogie of "Big Fat Money" and no less than three instrumentals, reportedly due to difficulty getting Hagar to write lyrics. The album continued the band's number one streak, holding the top spot for a week.

But within six months, Hagar would be history, leaving the group following disputes over the planned greatest-hits albums and the band's contributions to the *Twister* soundtrack (neatly summed up as "creative differences"). "We actually had problems on every album except for *5150*," Eddie revealed later. With Hagar's departure, old-school fans hoped beyond hope that a reunion with David Lee Roth was in the future—and it was, albeit for just two new songs for 1996's *Best of Volume 1*, "Me Wise Magic" and "Can't Get This Stuff No More." With "Magic" as its single, *Best Of* nailed *Billboard*'s top album spot, but almost as soon as the original lineup started feeling each other out, a disastrous backstage ego flareup at the MTV Video Music Awards squelched all hopes of future involvements between the band and Roth. "I'll put it very simply," said Eddie. "Dave and Sam both suffer from L.S.D.—lead singer's disease.

"Gary's very talented, and we work very, very well together," said Eddie.

With Cherone on board, *Van Halen III* was, as its title suggests, a new beginning for the band, and a major milestone—the first track was called "Neuworld" for a reason. Liberated from drugs, alcohol and various other physical and mental restraints, Eddie spoke in interviews passionately about his muse, his new approach to writing and recording music, as well as his emotional and spiritual rebirth. "I'd rather bomb with my own shit than make it with someone else's," he said at the time. Featuring Ed on six-string bass as well as electric sitar, the experimental album was released in February 1998, debuting at No. 4 on the album charts and powered by the single "Without You." However, many fans disliked the band's new direction and the album stalled.

Dark times for Van Halen quickly followed. Almost everything that could go wrong for Eddie did. The band parted ways with Cherone in November 1999. "I had a great time singing with the band and I wish Eddie, Alex and Michael all the best," said Cherone in a statement. The band had been working on a new album with producers Patrick Leonard and Danny Kortchmar; the results *(might as well jump to page 64)*

"I THINK A REUNION IS INEVITABLE." —SAMMY HAGAR

KEN SETTLE

THE NEW KING OF HEAVY METAL

GUITAR WORLD KICKED OFF ITS FIRST FULL YEAR OF OPERATION BY INTERVIEWING THE MAN WHO WOULD CHANGE ROCK GUITAR FOREVER. BY JOHN STIX

Reprinted from *Guitar World*, January 1981

"JUST GIVE ME SOME OF THAT ROCK AND ROLL MUSIC. Any old way you choose it. It's got a back beat you can't lose it Any old time you use it. Gotta be rock and roll music. If you want to dance with me." Chuck Berry's ode to the music he helped make great is all right with Edward Van Halen. You might just say that, at 23, Van Halen is simply respecting his elders as he explodes in the studio and onstage with music—the music he first lovingly nurtured in his basement and later turned up to a high flame in small bars, and, ultimately, in huge arenas.

The self-described "kid living his rock and roll dream" was born near Amsterdam, Holland, where his father, a professional musician, ensured that both Edward and his brother Alex were studying piano at an early age. The young Eddie practiced the classics diligently, but even then, his was a rock and roll heart.

"Who wanted to sit at the piano?" says Van Halen. "I wanted to go crazy. Everybody turned me on. I grew up on a lot of early Beatles, Dave Clark Five, Cream, Clapton, Page, Beck and Hendrix."

HE WAS 10 when the family moved to Los Angeles, where he attended local schools. The budding guitarist played the usual course of high school dances and, upon earning his diploma, immediately set his sights on the local bar circuit. "The members of Van Halen were all in various bands in the L.A. area," recalls Eddie. "But when we reached college age everyone else started flaking off, wanting to be doctors. We got stuck with each other." They played every dive and covered all the oldies, including a version of the Kinks' "You Really Got Me," which Eddie calls "a hot tune we turned into a jet plane."

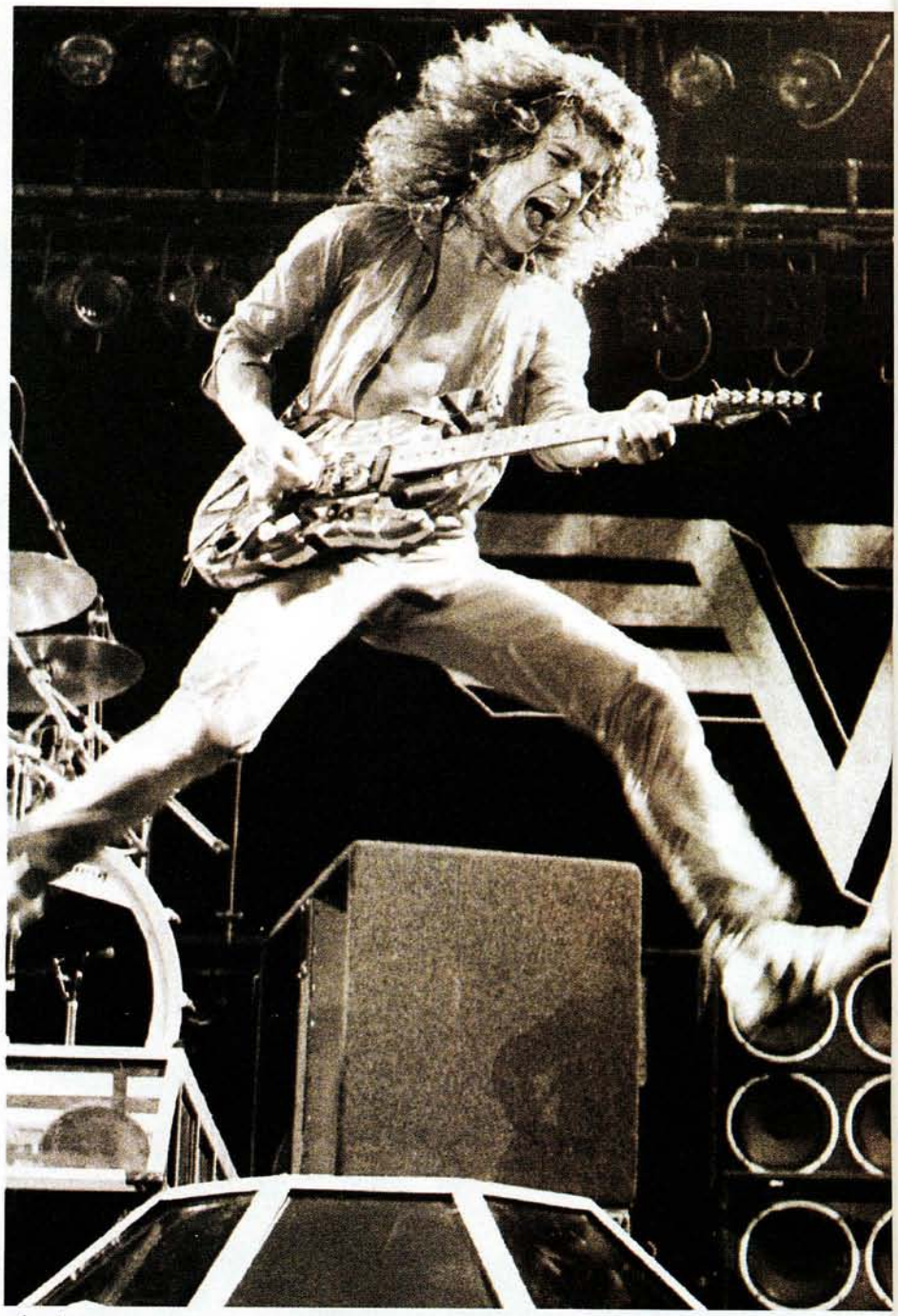
The crowds grew in size, to the point where it was not uncommon for a Van Halen gig to draw 3,000 people. Kiss' Gene Simmons became interested in the band, and paid for their first demo sessions. Ultimately, Warner Bros. chairman Mo Ostin caught their act at the Starwood Club. So impressed was Ostin that he signed Van Halen the next day. The rest, of course, is hard rock history: Over the next three years, the one-time bar band metamorphosed into an arena supergroup. "I never imagined that we would get to where we are this quickly," says EVH.

Edward Van Halen is hardly the arrogant, angry young man of rock and roll lore. No embittered snarls curl his lip; he is a perpetual grinner—his smile could successfully sell bad soft drinks on television. And why not? Eddie is one happy guy.

"Everything I did was because I wanted to do it," he says straightforwardly. "If I weren't playing this arena—if I were playing a club—I'd still be doing it, because that's what I want to do. I love playing the guitar."

He not only plays guitar, he builds them. When we met for this interview he was surrounded by guitar parts, preparing to assemble instruments for a performance that was only two hours away. As the individual pickups, bridges, necks and strings became guitars, I developed a very clear image of the technician himself. This was a brilliant, young, high-voltage rock guitarist who—despite his success—remarkably is able to keep his feet on the ground.

"I'm not a rock star," says Van Halen firmly. "When kids ask me how it feels to be a rock star, I say, 'Leave me alone.' I'm not in it for the fame, I'm in it because I like to play."



TOLCA/SUNSHINE/RETNA UK (THIS PAGE); SIMON FOWLER/LFI (PREVIOUS SPREAD)

GUITAR WORLD You began as a piano student. How advanced a player did you become?

EDWARD VAN HALEN I won first prize four years in a row at Long Beach City College for my category. The piano is a universal instrument. If you start there, learn your theory and how to read, you can go on to any other instrument.

GW It sounds like you had a solid foundation in the basics.

VAN HALEN Well, I'm not a good reader—I would read music and then memorize. The one thing I do have is good ears. I don't mean perfect pitch, but an ear for picking things up, which I developed through piano theory. But I never had a guitar lesson in my life, except from listening to Eric Clapton records.

GW Do you have the ability to hear something in your head and play it instantly?

VAN HALEN Not automatically or perfectly, but that's the thing—I don't think when I play. It's spontaneous, it's feeling. It's not calculated or worked out ahead of time. That's why you might say I play "off the wall." When I was in junior college at Pasadena City, I took a scoring and arranging class with a professor named Dr. Fischer. Frank Zappa also studied with him. Dr. Fischer was very avant garde—the one thing he taught me was to forget the rules. If it sounds good, it is good.

GW I imagine you took to the guitar fairly easily.

VAN HALEN Not to sound egoed out, but I was a natural. My father has been a professional musician all his life, and he told me, "Kid, you've got it." Some have got it and some don't, but even people who don't have it can practice long enough to get it down—to a point. There's always a difference between a person who has the feel and those who don't. The difference is in the amount of emotion expressed in your playing. I listened to a Debussy piece played by two different pianists, and it was like day and night. One guy had it and every note was beautiful. The

on which material gets recorded. We spend a week rehearsing in the basement, and go straight to the studio.

GW Sounds like you like to work quickly.

VAN HALEN *Women and Children First* took only four days for the music and six days for the vocals. "Dance the Night Away" [*Van Halen II*] was written on the spot, in the studio. I never played slide guitar before "Could This Be Magic?" I had something totally different in mind for the song, but Ted said, "Try playing slide." I did it right there on the spot, and that was it. "And the Cradle Will Rock..." was a first take—a bunch of songs were first takes. We don't go for perfection, we just go for spirit. There are mistakes, but I'm happy with everything on our records. That's not to say we won't play things differently when we perform live.

GW Do you prefer live work or recording?

VAN HALEN Performing, of course! I play for self-satisfaction, but it makes it even better when other people enjoy it.

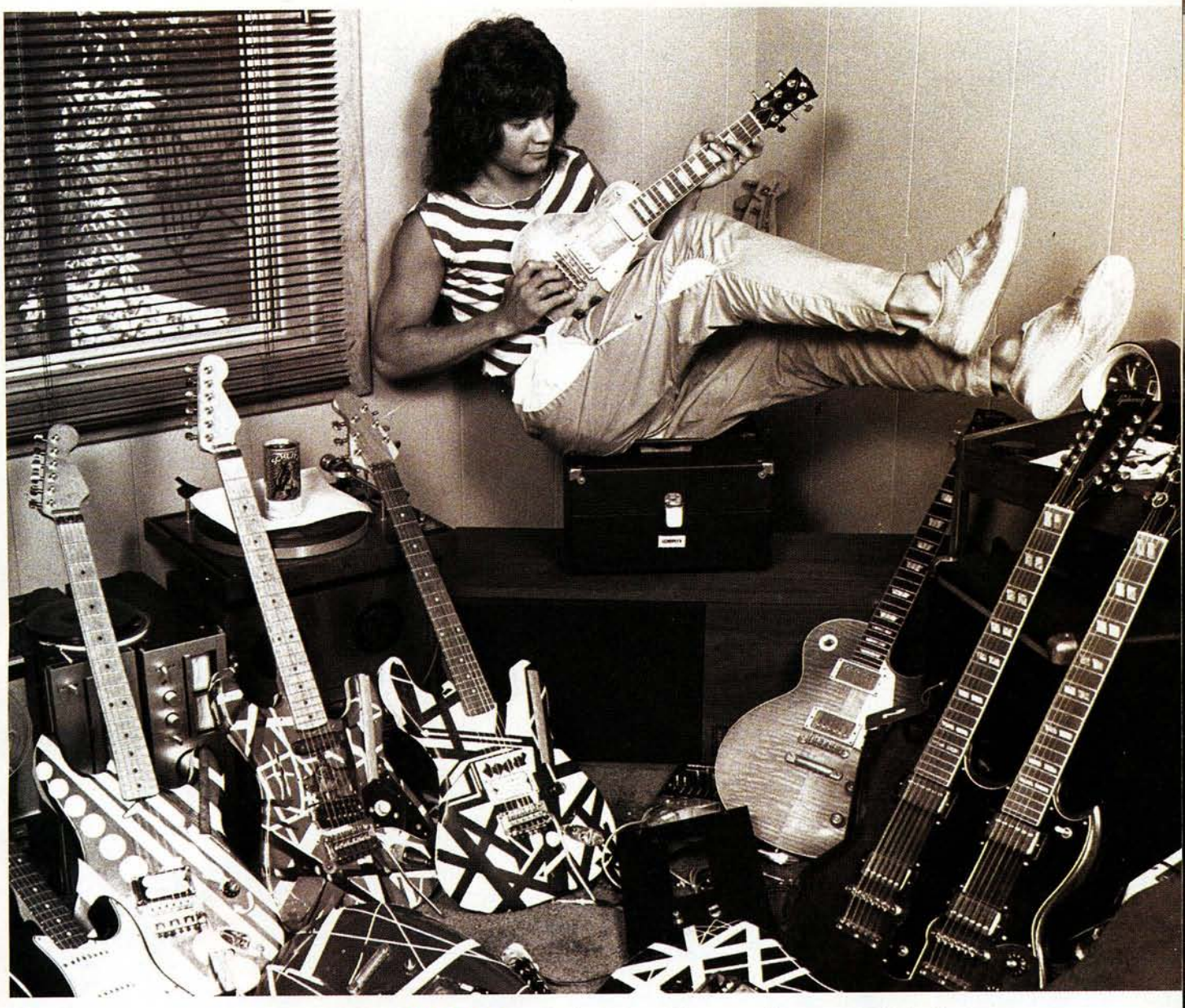
GW How did you learn to build guitars?

VAN HALEN Trial and error. I've ruined many guitars. I ruined a beautiful old Gibson ES-335 while I was learning to re-fret, but I've really become a pro since then.

GW Do you ever build them from scratch?

VAN HALEN Sometimes. The natural wood instrument was a very rough cut that I jigsawed out, contoured and fretted. My main guitar, the red one, used to be a

TTI/RETNA



Charvel copy of a Strat. A long time ago I used a '59 Strat. But the single pickup hummed too much and it sounded thin unless I used a fuzz box or something. After using the 335, I tried the Strat again and thought, Why don't I cut my own pickguard and put a humbucker in it? It worked, except Fender wood isn't as dense as I'd like. The Charvel is made of ash, which is a little denser. It was my idea to rear-load it.

GW What kind of pickups do you use?

VAN HALEN I use Gibson PAFs, DiMarzios and Seymour Duncans. I'd say that out of all the super distortion garbage out there, I like Seymour Duncan best. It's a matter of taste. I prefer old PAFs because they get the tone I like.

GW What about necks?

VAN HALEN I always use unfinished maple necks because I like to feel the wood. They're made by Linn Ellsworth at Boogie Body in Seattle, Washington.

GW Why only one pickup and volume control?

VAN HALEN In order for me to get the front pickup to sound the way I like, the back one would sound like crap.

GW Your tuning pegs are made by Schaller, but your nut and bridge piece look like custom gear. I've never seen anyone cut off the ball of the string before running it through the bridge.

VAN HALEN The nut and bridge are made by Floyd Rose. I use them for performing only—I don't use them in the studio because they're too bright-sounding for me. So I use the same guitar but with a different neck, a different PAF and a Fender bridge. I needed to have the guitar like this because we tune a little differently than most people. We use the Peterson Strobe Tuner (Model 420) to tune down a step and a quarter. You do lose something; the guitar was made to be tuned to A-440. When you start taking away from that, you lose harmonic overtones and get more slack in the strings. The only thing about the Floyd stuff is that if you break a string, the whole thing goes out of whack.

GW What about your "snake" guitar—who dreamed that up?

VAN HALEN A friend of mine, John Sterry, came up with the idea. It used to be an Explorer. The neck and body are of the rarest wood you can buy—Carina wood from Africa.

GW Are particular amplifiers important to you?

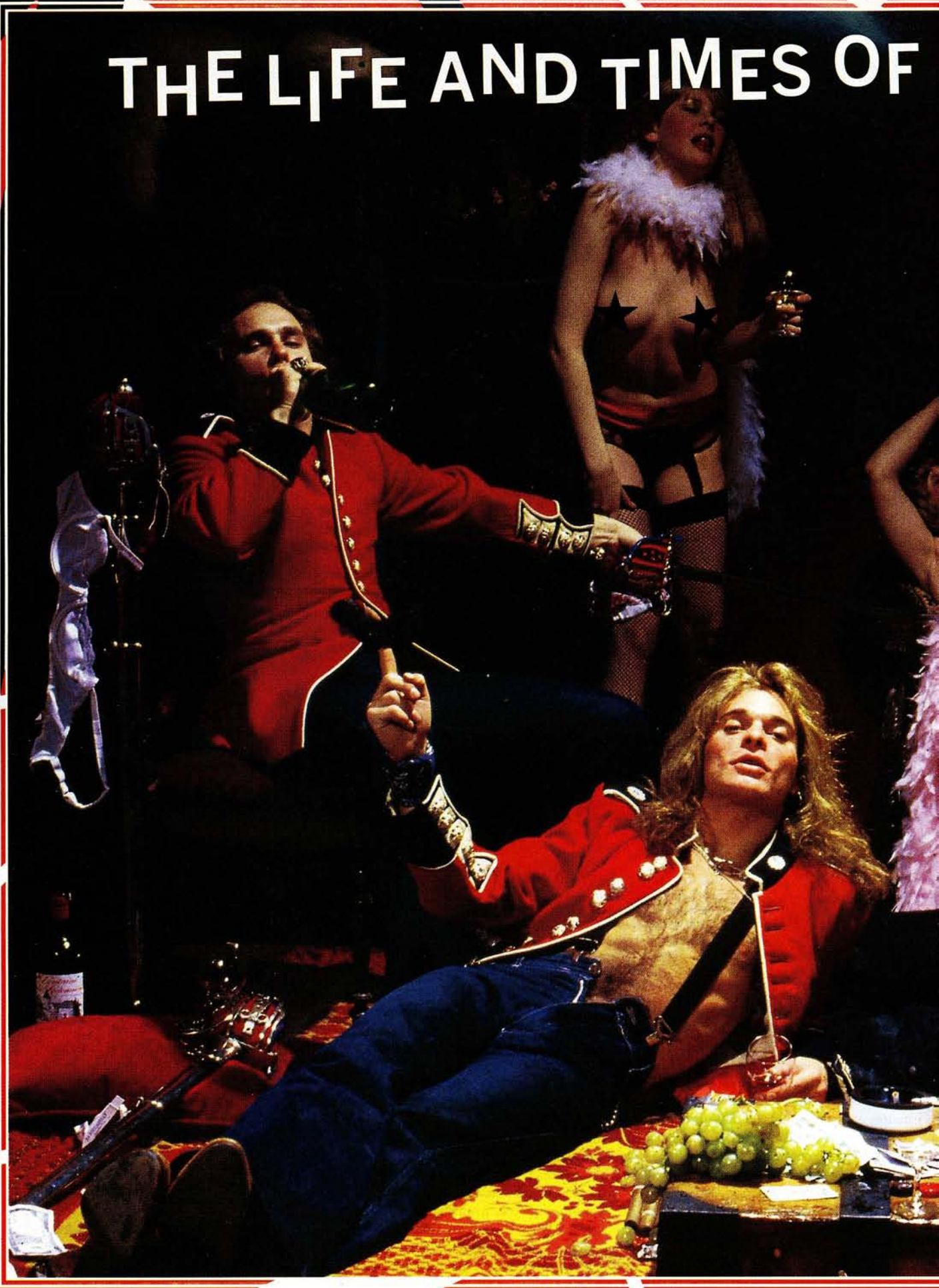
VAN HALEN Very important. I don't use any kind of preamp distortion—I go for total tube distortion. I have Mark II Marshalls, which I've changed back to tubes. In the studio I use my old baby 100-watt Super Leads with Marshall bottoms.

GW Do you use any outboard gear?

VAN HALEN My equipment is probably more primitive than what most people use. My pedal board is a piece of plywood with an MXR Phase 90, an Echo-Plex and an MXR Flanger. Ted Nugent laughed his ass off when he saw it the first time. I like making different sounds by using different techniques, as opposed to pedals.

TTI/RETNA

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF



VAN HALEN

AS "JUMP" HIT *BILLBOARD*'S NUMBER ONE SLOT, *GUITAR WORLD* PRESENTED ONE OF THE FIRST INTERVIEWS FROM 5150, EDWARD'S NEW HOME STUDIO. BY STEVEN ROSEN

Reprinted from *Guitar World*, July 1985

EDWARD VAN HALEN, BORN IN NIJMEGEN, the Netherlands, on January 26, 1957, has been disseminating what he calls "the brown sound" now for over six years, or since the Pasadena quartet released its self-titled debut album. *Van Halen* sold over two million copies, with every subsequent release—*Van Halen II*, *Women and Children First*, *Fair Warning*, *Diver Down* and *1984*—selling well in excess of one million units. *1984* finished sixth on *Billboard*'s Top Albums of 1984; the "Jump" single ranked sixth as well, after occupying the coveted Number One position for a time.

1984 is the first album recorded at Edward's 16-track home studio, 5150 (a name derived from an L.A. police code for the criminally insane). The cohesive batch of songs on the album re-establishes the balance and atmosphere which were notably absent from the group's *Diver Down* effort. Edward also establishes himself as a formidable synthesist on such tracks as the title song, "I'll Wait" and, of course, "Jump."

Coming off yet another world tour, Edward recently set aside several days to discuss *1984*, and the music he made prior to this breakthrough sixth album. Most of the conversations took place at 5150, amidst scattered guitars, reels of two-inch tape and empty beer cans. Rarely was the studio phone silent for more than an hour during our time together; it was during the unlikely lapses that much of the following interview took place.

Edward's schedule, even by a musician's standards, is a severe one. He ordinarily works from early evening to well past noon, experimenting with new guitars, programming rhythms on his LinnDrum and working on bits and pieces of music stashed on hundreds of scattered cassettes. "Noodling," he calls it.

Van Halen is wary of interviews—and interviewers—but quite adept at fielding questions. He is deliberate with his responses, and refreshingly forthright. As a result, what follows is a genuinely intimate look at the guitarist who, more than anyone since the golden days of the late Sixties, has redefined the limits of the electric six-string.

Eddie Van Halen's character hasn't changed. He is truly taken aback by compliments. Despite his enormous success, he is the same self-effacing man he was years ago, when the Van Halen group first signed with Warner Bros.

Here, then, is Edward Van Halen—father of the "brown sound."

GUITAR WORLD 1984 was a productive year for Van Halen.

EDWARD VAN HALEN The best year we've had. We started to see not just success, but also the satisfaction of knowing what we can accomplish. It was a strong year in every aspect.

GW Do you think it's the best music you've made?

VAN HALEN That's hard to say. I like everything we've done.

GW Did you think the *1984* album would

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NEIL ZLOZOWER (THIS PAGE)

be so well-received?

VAN HALEN I figured that it was good and would get noticed. But how can anyone say, "This is going to go Platinum?"

GW Are you the final arbiter of what eventually makes it on record?

VAN HALEN I'm not the only one involved. If the rest of the guys don't like something, I'm outvoted. But with regard to my happiness about something we've recorded, what I think of it is more important. If I like it and other people don't, of course my reaction might be, "Why don't they like it?" But I don't write to please other people. It's nice, but you have to please yourself first.

GW You've written songs that never made their way to vinyl.

VAN HALEN That's because Ted [*Templeman, Van Halen producer*] or somebody in the band voted against it, and decided it wasn't right for that point in time. "House of Pain" [*1984*] was written before we were signed. A lot of things I write aren't accepted with open arms, whether it's because of the instrumentation or that they just don't like the music.

GW What if you feel very strongly about a particular song?

VAN HALEN "I'll Wait" [*1984*] was one. Donn [*Landee, Edward's engineer*] and I both felt very strongly about it. Nobody else did, so we put it down ourselves. Then they heard it and said [*in dumb-struck tone*], "Uh, what's that?" I'm not going to sit there and cry if they don't like it, but sometimes something gets lost in the translation of an idea.

GW Does that happen very often?

VAN HALEN Obviously, it happens a lot. But the thing is, when you put it down on tape and they still don't like it, then there isn't a whole lot of room for miscommunication.

GW Do you think the difference in musical tastes between you and David Lee Roth has made Van Halen what it is?

VAN HALEN I'm sure that has had something to do with it, but it's not necessarily just Dave. It's Al and Ted and Donn and me all having different musical tastes. But it's not even musical tastes. Music is music, and if something is good and you like it, it's good. I like some jazz, I like some punk. Dave and Al listen to just about everything.

GW Van Halen seems to be the yardstick by which every other rock band is measured. Do you think that's because you write great songs?

VAN HALEN What's a great song? Lots of people think a song without singing is not a song. Tell that to Beethoven and he'll kick your ass.

GW Would you like to have been Beethoven?

VAN HALEN I wouldn't want to have died at the age he did [*57*]. Anyone who wouldn't want to be as respected as he is would be a fool. I'm happy being who I am—I wouldn't want to be anybody else.

GW How would you say your songwriting has grown?

VAN HALEN It just changes. I guess, if I look back, I am better because I've been doing it longer. Or maybe it's easier. I'm more comfortable, more at ease constructing a song. But coming up with the ideas is just as difficult. That's why I say I don't know if I've grown.

"I'm happy being who I am—I wouldn't want to be anybody else."

GW But you probably have a better understanding of when the structure is right.

VAN HALEN Probably, yeah, but that's like saying, "Yes, I've been conditioned."

GW No, it's just that you're learning the craft.

VAN HALEN Yeah, but who's to say what's right? It's all within yourself—and, I guess, within myself I've gotten a better handle on what I feel is right.

GW When did you first start writing?

VAN HALEN I've probably been coming up with riffs ever since I picked up an instrument. It was probably around the time I played high school dances. Just to back up a bit, a main element you're leaving out in my own songwriting is Donn Landee. Donn and I work together at structuring things—I bounce everything off of him before anyone hears it.

GW So had Donn not been part of the picture from the beginning, Van Halen's sound might have been different?

VAN HALEN Definitely. And it would be harder.

GW Donn understands you pretty well.

VAN HALEN You said what I was trying to say. We understand each other well. To the point where the way he makes things sound is basically the way I hear things in my head. This is very unusual.

GW So what the public hears on the tape is the guitar sound you heard in your head?

VAN HALEN Within each given song. I can't say every record was exact. But I'm happy with everything on the last album [*1984*], and Donn and I worked very much as one on that. We're proud of it because it's something we felt was an accurate representation of what we were capable of. That goes for the band as a whole, too. But it was Donn's and my baby.

GW You haven't really written lyrics to any extent.

VAN HALEN It's not something I'm good at, or something I've spent any time with. A lot of times the way people write lyrics is so personal that nobody knows what the hell the words mean. Dave is that way. I don't even know the lyrics to our own songs, and it's no joke. Because a lot of the stuff is Dave's interpretation of life at that given moment. And even if he experienced it, it doesn't click concerning my life or the state of the nation. [*laughs*]

GW When you write the music, you must have some idea of what the song should say, lyrically.

VAN HALEN I never suggest to Dave what to write the lyrics about. Once he writes lyrics, Ted and Al and I suggest going this way or that way with it. I guess that's why sometimes I don't lean toward his lyrics, because something about them takes away from the mood the music creates, even covers that mood. It might take it to a better place—and sometimes not. Sometimes it takes away from the original feel of what is happening. And I can't exactly say, "Hey, it was sexy before and it isn't now." It's a feeling. Like, how do you explain [*sings opening notes of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony*]? What words would you say to that? When something sounds a certain way, I can't easily picture lyrics with it. Because it's pretty self-explanatory.

GW Like the opening to "1984"?

VAN HALEN Yeah; I couldn't hear any singing over that.

GW What are your feelings about Dave's solo album?

VAN HALEN I think it's something he always wanted to do. I think it's great he's actually doing it. Put it this way—it's something I've always wanted to do, and haven't done. I guess, in a funny way, it explains Dave as a vocalist and lyricist. He did four cover tunes—"California Girls," "Easy Street," "Just a Gigolo" and one other one—yet managed to project his personality through them. I expect it to be accepted by people in the same way everything we've done has been. I've heard it all and it sounds real good. Edgar Winter played a lot of stuff on it, and one of the Beach Boys actually sang on "California Girls." Ted produced it. It's Dave.

GW Did Dave want any of your input?

VAN HALEN No. It's something he wanted to do alone. He actually started doing it when Donn and I were doing the film soundtrack for *The Wild Life*. It's not that he didn't want it, but what's a solo project if you're going to have your band playing on it?

GW Do you think Dave wanted to have some original songs?

VAN HALEN Yeah, I guess. You'd have to ask him that, to tell you the truth. I think these

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were tunes that Dave feels a part of and always liked and wanted to re-do. I don't think he's out to prove anything. I know it will be good for him personally and his own self-satisfaction when it takes off the way I expect and hope it will. I seriously want the best for it, in the same way he'd want the best for me or Al or Mike if we did anything outside the band.

GW What are your solo plans?

VAN HALEN I don't have any plans.

GW Certainly there must be a record in you that wants to come out.

VAN HALEN I'd say there are a few. I haven't thought about it enough or talked to Donn about it enough. I guess in a way I look at it as something Donn and I could do whenever. It's not like something we feel we have to do in order to show anything, or for any other purpose. If the band decided to take a year off, then I could do it. But I don't want the band to take a year off because I'm doing it.

GW Speaking of vocals, weren't you the band's singer before Dave joined?

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah.

GW Is that when you were known as the Broken Combs?

VAN HALEN Broken Combs was the very first. Alex played saxophone and I played piano. This was in fourth or fifth grade. We actually had some original tunes, too. One called "Rumpus" and one called "Boogie Booger."

GW So you've been playing with Alex since day one?

VAN HALEN He's the only one I've ever played with, really.

GW Was there any competition between the two of you?

VAN HALEN No. What I couldn't do he made up for, and what he couldn't do I made up for. That's how he started playing drums. I used to play drums and he'd play 'em better, so I said, "Go ahead, you play 'em if you can do it better." I wasn't going to waste my time proving to my own brother that I could do it better.

GW Did you play violin?

VAN HALEN Yeah, for about three years. Al did, too. That was at the end of elementary school and the beginning of junior high. It was school-based stuff. Al actually made All City Orchestra on violin. I never did.

GW Did you find it difficult?

VAN HALEN I didn't like playing the songs they made me play, so I just started messing around with it and lost interest.

GW So from the outset, you never followed the rules.

VAN HALEN It seems that I didn't. But it wasn't intentional. I remember sitting there, pluckin' on the violin and playing along with the *Peter Gunn* series on TV.

GW Did your father want you to play violin or piano, as opposed to guitar?

VAN HALEN It's hard to say exactly what he wanted us to be; he wanted us just to be successful in life. Deep down he wanted it to be music. He wanted it to be piano, only to the extent that piano is the springboard to ear training—you can orchestrate your fingertips. Each finger is a different instrument. I've learned a lot from piano, and I play it more now than I have because I can play it the way I want to. No one is looking over my shoulder and saying, "No, that's wrong."

GW You had actual piano training?

VAN HALEN Yeah, from age six to 12. I was good. I actually won three first-prize trophies at Long Beach City College for my category in an annual contest. You sit there and practice one tune for the whole year, and they put you in a category and judge you. I think I won first place twice and second place the last time, which kind of showed I was losing interest. [*laughs*]

GW How old were you when you got your first guitar?

VAN HALEN About 12 or 13. It was a flamenco Spanish guitar, but I didn't really consider it *my* guitar. It was Alex's, and he took classical guitar lessons while I banged away on the drums. I got left with his guitar when he started playing the drums, and decided to get an electric. It was a four-pickup $110 Teisco Del Ray from Sears. I liked it because it had the most pickups. It was fun.

GW Did you feel anything special when you picked up the electric for the first time?

VAN HALEN No, no message from God or anything. I thought it was neat. Some things were easy, some things were hard. I didn't even think about whether it was easy or hard; it was something I wanted to do, to have fun and feel good about doing it. Whether it took me a week to learn half a song or one day to learn five songs, I never thought of it that way.

GW When did you become aware of guitarists like Page, Beck and Clapton?

VAN HALEN I remember hearing Jimmy Page when a friend brought over the first Led Zeppelin album. And I tripped on it. I might have actually heard that before I heard Cream. My listening history is disjointed to me. I think I might have gotten into Cream, and then dug back to find the Bluesbreakers. I got into blues for a while and then went back to Cream. It wasn't that I was into blues and followed Clapton. I just knew I really dug him and then dug back and really got into a blues kick for six or eight months, or a year. Just jamming with guys, not really playing any songs, but jamming for hours on end, playing the same progression. Fallin' down the stairs and landing on your feet.

GW Your technique and style were developing here?

VAN HALEN Yeah, but it was just fun to do. I didn't think, If I do this for a year, I'll know this side of it. It was just a very natural thing; I wasn't doing anything for any purpose.

GW Did you say to yourself at this point, "I want to be a musician?"

VAN HALEN I have to think about when that was. I was still in junior high, so I wasn't the rebellious one—yet. Actually, I wasn't that rebellious anyway. I just managed to get myself into trouble without having to be rebellious. I never could get over how my friends could get away with murder and I was the only one to ever get caught at doing nothing.

GW Did bands like Mammoth come together while you were in high school?

VAN HALEN Yeah, ninth, tenth grade. Genesis was another band during that time. Then there was the Trojan Rubber Company. We also used to be called the Space Brothers. When we began playing high school dances and parties we had a hell of a reputation. This is funny because Al, Donn and I were just talking about this the other day—how it seems that only since Dave has been in the band did we get this rowdy and crazy brown cloud hanging over us. But we had it way before Dave was even in the band. Schools wouldn't hire us, nobody wanted anything to do with us, so we had to change the name of the band to the Space Brothers, just so we could play these gigs at a Catholic school.

GW What kinds of songs did you play?

VAN HALEN You name it: Grand Funk, Black Sabbath, Deep Purple, Cream…

GW Was Gazarri's [*a local Hollywood club*] your first semi-professional gig?

VAN HALEN It was a breakthrough, yes. You know I got kicked out of clubs because I played too psychedelic.

EDDIE VAN HALEN on…

"JUMP" (1984)

"That was the first song I wrote that was recorded in my home studio, 5150. It's a pretty well-known fact that certain people didn't want me playing keyboards because they thought I should only be a 'guitar hero.' But hey, I'll play Bavarian cheese whistle, if I play it well—whatever that is."

"PANAMA" (1984)

"It was kind of AC/DC-inspired. We had just done a tour with them the year before, and the power of those guys blew my mind—the constant 'boom, boom, boom.' They play the same song over and over, but it's a great song. They were probably one of the most powerful live bands I've ever seen in my life. The energy…they were just unstoppable."

ZLOZOWER (SIDEBAR)

GW You even had problems getting *into* Gazarri's.

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah! We had to audition there at least three or four times. A guy would come running up in the middle of a song because I was too loud. But I didn't play that loud deliberately; the amp only sounded like an amp if it was all the way up. So I did everything—from keeping the plastic cover on it, to facing it against the walls, to putting Styrofoam padding in front of the speakers.

GW Were you playing the homemade, one-pickup guitar at this point?

VAN HALEN Not right in the beginning. I used to play a Les Paul and a 335, or whatever guitar I had at the time. I also played a Les Paul Junior. That was around the time I got a Strat and the guys didn't like it—"Sounds too thin." I said, "Okay, I'll take care of that." I slapped a humbucker in there and figured out how to wire up the rest of the stuff.

GW So the idea for putting a humbucker in a Stratocaster body came about as a matter of necessity?

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah. I just chiseled a hole in the body. I think I might even have some footage from the Whisky, where I played that original Fender Strat. It isn't the same one that appears on the first album. It's when I realized, Hey, this is neat, and got one from Charvel that was actually a Linn Ellsworth guitar.

GW Had you seen or heard anyone reworking guitars like this?

VAN HALEN No. I hadn't really seen or heard anyone taking any time to try keeping a vibrato bar in tune either. A friend brought over a bootleg album of Hendrix in concert where he'd grab the bar, and the rest of the night it was out of tune. It was important for me, because for a long time before the Floyd Rose was developed I used a regular Fender vibrato. If you see the guitar on the first album cover there's no Floyd Rose. I actually did the first world tour with that guitar.

GW How did you keep it in tune?

VAN HALEN That's a tough one to explain. Due to the tension between the nut and the tuning peg, if you bring the angle of the string down it gets stuck in the nut. So I got a brass nut with extra big grooves and no string retainers, and I used to stick the string into the Schallers and wind it upward so the angle would be straight. I'd oil the brass nut, stick the string through the body, wind it a few times and then turn the ball end of the string, because when you tighten a string, you get tension along the string itself. I'd turn the ball so it was straight. That was just another thing in my mind that could cause a rubber band

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effect—where you loosen a string and it wouldn't come back to where it was. It's hard to say how much any of this had to do with it because certain strings would still go out of tune—they'd go sharp because they'd get caught up somewhere. So you'd have to go and snap it back before you hit the next chord. The thing is, I never hit all six strings when I play a chord; I'm usually doing some take-off on a chord, somehow.

I did this other thing once with a 335. They used to have a real cheap spring metal—bending vibrato on them; SGs had it too. I sawed my 335 in half because I figured I could always land on my feet and make it through a song barre-chording with the low E, A and D strings. So when I hit the vibrato bar it would only be for the high E, B and G strings. It worked great, it was neat. The three high strings would always be out of tune, and the low ones would always be in so I could always chord my way through, somehow. But the guys thought the 335 looked like something Johnny Rivers would play. I actually did that before I got a Strat. I did everything to that 335—belt-sanded it, repainted it, refretted it.

GW Who made the body of your first guitar?

VAN HALEN Boogie. I painted it almost immediately, because it was a wooden body, no finish. It was a junky, piece-of-shit body on the bottom of a stack of other bodies. It was a second. I gave the guy $50 and got a [*Boogie*] neck for $80. I picked up the body and neck and slapped it together; it's not that difficult.

GW What kind of guitar sound did you hear?

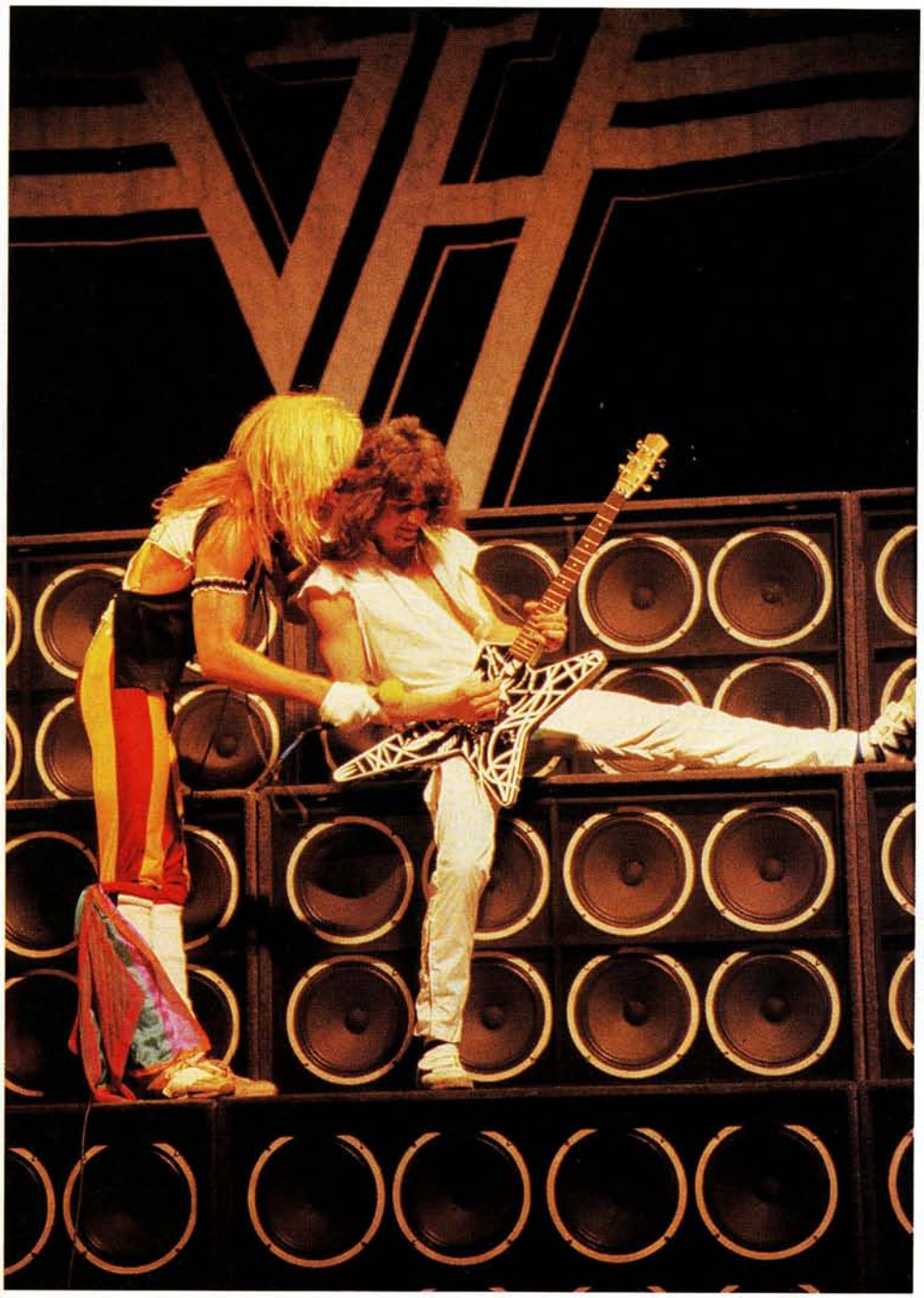
VAN HALEN I guess a cross between a Gibson and a Fender—a humbucker sound with a vibrato. Bigsbys were totally childish things. You couldn't really use them to bend pitches; they were a vibrato type of thing. What I wanted to do was fall off the edge of buildings.

GW Did you install Gibson frets?

VAN HALEN Yeah. I got the fret wire from Linn Ellsworth and slapped them in. He told me how to do it. A couple popped up here and there so I got out the Krazy Glue.

GW Do you remember the first time you played the guitar after it was assembled?

VAN HALEN Yeah, it was neat. I thought, You can't buy one of these! I felt like I was onto something, and obviously I was.



GW Why just one pickup?

VAN HALEN In a two-humbucker–style Gibson, in order to get a clean, bright front pickup [*neck position*] sound, you'd have to sacrifice the sound of the rear pickup. I couldn't get what I wanted out of the front pickup, and I didn't feel like compromising, so I tended to stick with the rear one. And I tried to make up for a different sound color with playing techniques.

GW You used this guitar for the first tour?

VAN HALEN Before the first tour—during the Starwood and Whisky days. That was a couple of years before the first album.

GW Had you always used Marshalls?

VAN HALEN I tended to blow them up, so I used an old white Bassman or Bandmaster through a Marshall cabinet. I can't remember.

GW Were you using pedals?

VAN HALEN Same thing as on the first three tours: MXR flanger, MXR phaser and an Echoplex.

GW What was that hollowed-out bombshell you had onstage?

VAN HALEN That's what I used for the tail end of "Eruption." It was a Univox echo chamber. It had a miniature eight-track cassette in it, and the way it would adjust the rate of repeat was by the speed of the motor, and not by tape heads. So if you recorded something on the tape, the faster you played the motor back the faster it would repeat. And vice versa. I liked some of the noises I got out of them, but their motors would always burn out. I don't know how many broken ones I have. Then they stopped making them.

GW What was it like, recording the first album?

VAN HALEN We didn't have a whole lot to say about much of anything. The songs basically got recorded the way we played 'em. Very few

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overdubs. I guess it was Ted's idea to make it come off as pure and simple and honest as it was live.

GW Did you agree with that?

VAN HALEN I wasn't sure. By the time Donn got through with it, I really liked it. I didn't know what making a record was. I guess it was good that we did approach it that way, because when we played live, you were only going to get more.

GW Did the songs on the first album mirror what you'd been playing live?

VAN HALEN Yeah. Things like "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" and "Jamie's Cryin' " weren't on the original demo.

GW Had you been playing "Eruption" live?

VAN HALEN Yeah. Ted heard me practicing it for a Whisky show while I was waiting and he asked, "What's that?" I just didn't think it would be something we'd put on a record. He liked it, Donn liked it, and everyone else agreed that we should throw it on. I played it two or three times for the record, and we kept the one which seemed to flow. I like the way it sounds; I've never heard a guitar sound like it. It's not that my playing was so great, it just sounds like some classical instrument. Donn really made it sound like more than it is, in a way.

GW Were there any other songs you recorded which didn't make it onto *Van Halen*?

VAN HALEN "Loss of Control," which ended up on *Women and Children First*. We wrote "Loss of Control" and "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" at the same time; we were actually making fun of punk rockers. "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love" was actually a stupid thing to us, just two chords. It didn't end up sounding punk, but that was the intention.

GW Had you been in a studio prior to the first album?

VAN HALEN We were in the studio once before, with [*Kiss bassist*] Gene Simmons. That was about a year before.

GW What did you learn from that experience?

VAN HALEN I learned that I didn't like overdubbing. Gene naturally assumed I knew that was how it's done. Ordinarily, I would noodle between chord lines, and I had to fill in those rhythm spots on the tape. And I'd say, "Oh, I can't do that, I have to stick to this." So it was rather uncomfortable. When we got in the studio with Ted and Donn, I asked them if it would be okay to play the way I do live. And they said, "Sure, make it easier for all of us."

GW Prior to going into the studio with him, had you heard any of Ted's work?

VAN HALEN The first Montrose album; that was about it. Before we went into the studio to do the first album, we did a demo tape for Warner Bros. with Ted and Donn. There were 30 songs on it, and afterward we picked songs from those for the first album. We did the 30 songs in one day, and the next day, Dave, Mike and I put down the vocals. But after we did that demo tape we came up with other songs, like "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love." So since we'd done a demo tape, it was easy doing the record because it was the same setup and same way of recording. As a matter of fact, we have a bunch of songs from that tape we still haven't done. But they were written then, and I think I write better now. "House of Pain" was on that tape, and that just ended up on the last album [*1984*]. Some of the other titles were "Babe Don't Leave Me Alone" and "Peace of Mind." Good tunes, but, Van Halen–wise, kind of dated. They're a little dumber rock.

"I didn't think 'Eruption' would be something we'd put on a record. But I like the way it sounds."

GW What was the first song you recorded?

VAN HALEN I don't remember. "On Fire," I think. I played the harmonics at the beginning on the A and D strings, one fret down from the E position [*seventh fret*] on the A string. It's actually not a harmonic; it's just a muffled, dead, weird sound. It sounded kind of machine-like. We wanted a little break between verses, and I said, "This is neat, how about this? It sounds rude."

GW Did you use a sitar on "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love"?

VAN HALEN I doubled that one part. It could have been a Coral guitar, but it looked real cheap. It looked like a Danelectro with some kind of stuff muffling the strings back there. I never really knew it was an electric sitar, because it didn't sound like one. It just sounded like a buzzy-fretted guitar. The thing was real bizarre.

GW How did you get that swishing sound on the intro to "Atomic Punk"?

VAN HALEN I used an MXR Phase 90 and rubbed my palm over the pickup. And then during two of the breaks I used a MXR flanger.

GW You used MXR pedals from the beginning?

VAN HALEN Yeah. I don't really use them anymore. I just use an Echoplex.

GW The guitar shown on the cover of the first album is the one you built?

VAN HALEN It's the same guitar I used on all the albums, and all the tours up until the *1984* tour. It was my baby until I started using the Kramers. For a while I was putting Kramer necks on that main guitar [*pictured on the* Van Halen *cover*]. For the second album, I had that black and yellow guitar [*pictured on the back cover*].

GW Why did you change your guitar?

VAN HALEN I don't know why I played that black and yellow one. I liked the way it looked, but I didn't like the way it sounded. Actually, I used an Ibanez Destroyer for a lot of *Van Halen*—the guitar that is on the *Women and Children First* cover. On all the stuff that didn't have any vibrato on it, I used the Ibanez. "You Really Got Me," the rhythm track of "Jamie's Cryin' " and "On Fire," too. It has a PAF on it. It was one of the few guitars made out of Korina wood that you could get, without spending an arm and a leg for an original "V" or something. It was a great-sounding guitar—until I took a chunk out of it to make it look nice, to make it look different. On the cover of *Women and Children First*, it's missing a piece. Boy, did I screw it up.

GW It changed the sound?

VAN HALEN Oh, completely. It ruined it. [*laughs*] It went from sounding like a nice, fat, warm guitar to "What the hell happened?" I couldn't believe it. The sound changed from a fat, Les Paul–type sound to a

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real weak Strat sound. I thought I'd ruined the pickup when I took the chunk of wood out, so I stuck in another pickup. But it sounded the same—real bad. I think it was because I took the wood out right by the bridge; that's where a lot of resonance and tone come from.

GW What is that story about Angel almost releasing "You Really Got Me" before Van Halen did?

VAN HALEN Yeah. A couple of guys from Angel were friends, acquaintances. One day—I forget where we were, it might have been the Rainbow—I was braggin' about our album, saying, "Hey, this is bad, you ought to listen to this." Because they had been talking about their new stuff. So we went up to [*drummer*] Barry Brandt's house, and they were all blown away by the album. They were all listening very carefully to this and that, and I left there feeling real good and proud. The next morning Ted Templeman called me up and said, "Did you play that tape for anybody?" And I said, "Yeah, I played it for all kinds of people!" He was pissed. I didn't know, nobody told me not to play it for anyone. I guess they figured I knew. And he said, "You asshole, why did you do that?" Because through the grapevine, Ted heard that Angel went into the studio and was trying to put out a single of "You Really Got Me" before us.

GW That really wouldn't have changed anything…

VAN HALEN I think it could have hurt. [*laughs*] So we released it as soon as possible—even before the album was out, I think. We had performed that song live for years. When we recorded demo tapes with Ted and Donn, that was actually the last song we did. Ted said then, "Well, you got anything else?" And we said, "Well, we've got some cover tunes." He said, "Play 'em."

It kind of bummed me out that Ted wanted our first single to be someone else's tune. I would have maybe picked "Jamie's Cryin'," just because it was our own.

GW Did the success of "You Really Got Me" lead to your doing another cover for the second album?

VAN HALEN I don't know how "You're No Good" came about. I guess it was Ted. He figured, "Hey, it worked the first time, let's try it again." I really don't remember how it ended up being picked. I didn't even remember how the damn song went. We used to play it in the bars, at Gazarri's, but we didn't play it like that. We played it like the original [*Linda Ronstadt*] record. I know how this version came about, but I don't know how it came about that we used the song. Ted hummed the tune to me, and that's how I came up with the riff; I was just trying to noodle my way through it to figure out the chords. We never listened to the record to learn it. So I don't know if it's right or not.

GW Do you remember when hammer-ons became part of your style?

VAN HALEN I think it was around the end of the Gazarri's days.

GW Had you heard of anyone playing like that?

VAN HALEN Honestly, no. I'm sure people had but I'd never seen anyone.

GW The sound of the bass on the first two albums seemed to be a little buried.

VAN HALEN I guess the sound Mike was getting at the time was either smothering everything if it was too loud or impossible to hear if you put it where it fit.

GW Did you suggest bass parts?

VAN HALEN Some things would just obviously follow the guitar-type of stuff, unless I had a specific bass line. Otherwise, Mike does whatever he feels like doing.

GW Moving on to *Women and Children First*, did the album mark the first time you used a keyboard in the studio?

VAN HALEN Yeah, on "And the Cradle Will Rock…" I had an old Wurlitzer electric piano and I pumped it through my Marshalls. A lot of people don't even know that because it doesn't really sound like a keyboard. That was my first encounter with the band not wanting me to play keyboards—when we did the song live, Mike played it. They didn't want a "guitar hero" playing keyboards, and that kind of ties in with why they didn't want "Jump."

GW The break in "Romeo Delight" had a real Who-type feel to it. Were you aiming for a *Live at Leeds* quality?

VAN HALEN It just kind of happened. I never try to get a certain kind of feeling. I just try to get any type of feeling at all—whatever comes out. [*laughs*] Whatever came out is the feeling I got.

GW There's also a heartbeat sound on "Romeo Delight."

VAN HALEN I think Mike was picking quietly, and I tapped my string against the pickup poles.

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GW Was that the Stratocaster?

VAN HALEN I think that was the Ibanez. I butchered it for the photo session after the record was recorded. [*Sometime after this conversation took place, Edward remembered borrowing an Ibanez Destroyer from Chris Holmes of W.A.S.P. and using it for portions of the* Women and Children First *album.*]

GW At the beginning of "Fools," you play some Eric Clapton–style blues.

VAN HALEN Yeah; I don't know where that came from. I think it was Ted's idea to get Dave's voice to sound that way. He wanted people to hear a different side of Dave's voice. That backup kind of blues guitar seemed to fit. That was the Ibanez.

GW There are all kinds of effects happening in the intro of "Everybody Wants Some!!"

VAN HALEN I did kind of a cello thing on the low E string with the palm of my hand. It's the same technique used on "Atomic Punk," but I'm not hitting all the strings.

GW What is that little piece of music that just fades into nothingness at the very end of side two?

VAN HALEN It was something Al and I were working on. I forget what we called it—"Growth," or something like that. We thought that just for the hell of it we'd stick it at the end of the record. And possibly start the next record with it. But it never amounted to anything, so we left it at that.

GW To my mind, *Fair Warning* took Van Halen to a higher level in terms of record production. There were more guitar parts and more textures. Is that accurate?

VAN HALEN I guess. I remember I approached my playing a little differently, where almost every song had an overdub in it, whereas before it was kept way down to a minimum. I wrote rhythm parts that I intended to solo over.

GW Are you able to hear in your head what the various parts will sound like when they're finally put together?

VAN HALEN Yeah, I usually can tell, but sometimes what I hear in my head doesn't work. But the majority of the time it does.

GW You did some of the writing for *Fair Warning* on piano?

VAN HALEN I did some stuff on piano and some stuff that still hasn't been used—obviously. [*laughs*] The album took a long time to record, because I was getting married and this and that. In the same way *1984* took the longest because the US Festival got in the way. We'd start to record, and then we'd have to make a radio program, etc. Every time we'd start to record it was [*in nasal voice*], "Oh, yeah, we forgot to tell you, you owe us this by tomorrow." The US Festival was actually like a whole tour's worth of work for one hour of playing—everything from the stage setup to rehearsing for it to all the video stuff that we owed them. I know Donn and I were happy to wash our hands clean of that when it was done.

GW What is the technique you use at the beginning of "Mean Street"?

VAN HALEN I tapped on the 12th fret of the low E and the 12th fret of the high E, and muffled both with my left hand down by the nut. I got kind of a funk slap out of the guitar. I applied to guitar what bass players do when they slap. But it's not like I studied it or anything.

GW The solo on "Mean Street" was very aggressive. Were you an angry young man that day?

VAN HALEN [*laughs*] I wasn't trying to be mad, but it just seemed to fit. I think I did do some interesting solos on the *Fair Warning* album.

GW You decided to try your hand at slide again on "Dirty Movies."

VAN HALEN I came up with the melody of it on slide, so I played it on the record on slide. The funny thing was I couldn't get up high enough on the guitar, so I sawed part of it off. I used an old Les Paul Junior that had an SG body style and that one hook…what do you call it?

GW Horn?

VAN HALEN Horn. Yeah, the bottom one was in the way, so I took a hacksaw right there in the studio and said, "Hold this, Ted," and sawed it off.

GW Didn't you do something interesting with the solo in "So This is Love?"

VAN HALEN Out of six solo tracks, Ted let me mess around a little bit, but I don't think he thought I could get anything. Then Donn showed up and said, "Why don't you try it once?" I thought I was just trying it, but he recorded my composite and that was my first attempt. It's like four solos punched together. That surprised a few people.

GW Do you go through different feels for a solo before coming up with one that you think will work?

VAN HALEN I don't know. It's not an intentional, planned-out thing. Whatever sounds right, I guess.

GW Do you know if it's right when you hear it back?

VAN HALEN Yeah. Obviously, you'd

"Cream made music exciting in a way I don't think people really understood. It was almost as if the lyric and the actual song structure was secondary."

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better know if it's right when you hear it back. If not, you're up the creek.

GW "Sunday Afternoon in the Park" was another song that featured synthesizer.

VAN HALEN It was one of those cheap little kid's toys, an Electro Harmonix. It didn't have any notes; you could rub your hand across the whole octave of the board and it would go *rrrrrrrrrrrrr* [*rolls tongue and imitates sequencer line*]. I just blazed it through the Marshalls. It was cheaper than a Casio, and was made of cardboard, plastic and a little sensor keyboard.

GW Could this have been the seed for "Jump"?

VAN HALEN As a matter of fact, I might have had "Jump" by then.

GW You approached the tracks on *Diver Down* differently than you did those of the first four albums.

VAN HALEN Basically, we did more finishing up of individual tracks before moving on to the next.

GW You did four cover songs on *Diver Down*.

VAN HALEN That was too many—four too many. Dave always wanted to redo "Dancing in the Streets," and I remember him giving me a tape of it. I said, "I can't get a handle on anything out of this." I didn't want to do it, I didn't like it. So I suggested "Pretty Woman," because that seemed more a Van Halen song to cover. It was us. I was working on something on the Mini-Moog, and Ted happened to hear the riff and said, "Wow, we can use this for "Dancing in the Streets." So Ted and Dave were happy—and I wasn't. Because the riff I had for something else got used for a song I didn't even want to do.

GW Were you using the Kramers for this record?

VAN HALEN I've never used a Kramer on record. I only got them for the *1984* tour. I may have put a Kramer neck on the guitars.

GW What attracts you to the Kramer?

VAN HALEN I just like their guitars. I play one all the time now, for recording and everything. The stuff I did for the *Wild Life* film was all on the Kramer.

GW You used a Fender Stratocaster on "Cathedral."

VAN HALEN Yeah, with an echo setting similar to that of "Dancing in the Streets," except it was a little slower so you could get that arpeggiated sound.

GW And you played a 12-string on "Secrets"?

VAN HALEN Yeah, one of those Gibson double-neck jobs. They were too heavy. I played it live and my shoulder was aching afterward. No wonder Jimmy Page has a slouch.

GW How did people react to "Secrets"?

VAN HALEN I thought it was a great song. It was different for us. Not for the sake of being different, but since we have something different we might as well stick it out there. I think that should have been the single before "Dancing in the Streets." But somehow it just got lost in the shuffle.

GW What guitar did you use on "Little Guitars"?

VAN HALEN We were on tour in Memphis during *Fair Warning* and, sitting on the steps outside the hotel was a kid named David Petschulat, who stopped me and said, "Here, Eddie, check this out." And I went, "Wow." It was a perfect replica of an older Les Paul, except it was one third the size. I tripped, it was neat. So I took it to sound check and plugged it in. It sounded like a normal guitar,

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except higher in pitch. I started playing around on it and came up with the music for "Little Guitars." Later on, [*ZZ Top guitarist*] Billy Gibbons gave me a couple of those little Chiquita jobs, but I never really played them.

GW Which brings us to the *1984* album. If *Van Halen*, *Van Halen II* and *Women and Children First* represent the first phase of the band's development, and *Fair Warning* and *Diver Down* represent the second level, then *1984* surely must be the third phase?

VAN HALEN In a way, it's Phase One of Donn and Ed. Donn and I were very involved in this record. We almost took control, to a point, because it was done here in our studio, and we knew what we wanted. We weren't about to let the album be puked out in any way—especially since it was done here. We wanted it to be an accurate representation of the sound of this studio, and in a way I guess we were proving ourselves—to ourselves, more than anybody. I think everything sounds the best; I like it all.

GW Did you play any other guitars besides the Stratocaster?

VAN HALEN I used a Gibson Flying V on "Hot for Teacher" and "Drop Dead Legs." Actually, I've used a lot of different guitars, recording-wise, but live I usually use just one. I used the V because I needed the pickup switch to do the quiet part in "Hot for Teacher." Live, I used a Roland echo box with a volume knob on it, and I hooked it up to my pedal boards so I could hit the pedal and drop the volume, because I couldn't reach for the knob quick enough on the guitar. That song was beyond any boogie I've ever heard. It was pretty powerful.

GW Did the overall success of *1984* give the band more freedom to wander outside the boundaries?

VAN HALEN It gave me the freedom to play keyboards comfortably. Now I don't have to worry about what the rest of the guys think other people will think. I never worried about what anyone thinks, except it makes you feel kind of uncertain when the guys worry.

GW "I'll Wait" was another keyboard song.

VAN HALEN That was one they really didn't want. It was actually that, more than "Jump," they didn't want to touch with a 10-foot pole. So Donn and I basically did the track with Al. Ted and Dave didn't like it.

GW Where did the song "1984" come from?

VAN HALEN The intro? That was the very first thing we ever did in this studio here. I was out there noodling on a synthesizer, and Donn was recording it without my knowledge. It was 45 minutes of me noodling like that. And we ended up using part of it.

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GW Having 5150 must have opened up a new world for you.

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah. *1984* would not have been what it is if it wasn't done here.

GW Have you worked a long time at developing the "brown sound"?

VAN HALEN Not really. Yes and no. It's basically a tone, a feeling that I'm always working at. Everything is involved in that, and I've been working with it since I've been playing. It comes from the person.

GW Was the brown sound being developed when you were listening to Eric Clapton and learning all his solos?

VAN HALEN I don't know. It was always the live stuff I was into.

GW Could you listen to "Crossroads," for example, and pick out the solo note-for-note?

VAN HALEN Not that easily. Because the way Baker, Bruce and Clapton played live, those guys twisted and bent to the ultimate extremes of 4/4. There was something about them that I say about myself, though I'm not saying I'm in their league or bitchin' in that way at all, but they had a quality of falling down the stairs and landing on their feet. Listen to "I'm So Glad," on *Goodbye Cream*. Incredible, man! For my mind, nothing has matched it to this day. It was totally reckless-abandon-but-knowing-where-you're-goin'. People used to think I was nuts to sit there and listen over and over to what they would call noise. I don't even care if they knew what the other guy was doing. Going from total confusion to clicking together blew me away. I'm sure they weren't that good every night.

GW That's the key.

VAN HALEN Exactly. In a fun way, pushing yourself for yourself. Pushing yourself to a limit and taking a chance.

GW Does Van Halen take chances?

VAN HALEN Al and I do, all the time. Dave doesn't really like it and Mike isn't really plugged in with Al and me, so he kind of stops and lets us go crazy. Al and I just jam; sometimes we get carried away and go for too long, and we'll hear about it after the show. The next night we'll do it even longer! I'm joking. We don't do it on purpose; we do it because, to me, that's what making music is about. And that's what I always loved about Cream. They made music exciting in a way I don't think people really understood. It was almost as if the lyric and actual song structure was secondary. "Let's get this shit over with so we can make music and see where we land tonight." I loved that.

GW Have you done that on record?

VAN HALEN No. We've captured feelings to that effect but we've never put anything on record that is a jam, where somebody starts something, somebody follows and you work off each other. Al and I do that all the time by ourselves, but we've never put that on record because it's not a hit single. But who cares about a hit single?

"I'm partly brainwashed by the whole aspect of the business—that there's something expected of me."

GW Maybe that's where an album on your own might come in.

VAN HALEN Oh yeah, sure. But why even bother? Why not just do it and feel good about having done it?

GW You said earlier you weren't interested in hit singles. It seems you're sure that if you find enjoyment in it, other people wouldn't. That's not necessarily the case.

VAN HALEN That's true. But I guess I don't understand the rationale for putting something that personal out. And I guess Cream had more balls than I ever had. They did that and said, "Here we are." I guess the closest we've gotten to that is the first album, which was basically recorded live in the studio.

GW And that first album really captured a moment.

VAN HALEN It was different. But if the next album had been the same, then it wouldn't have been different, would it? It's very difficult to figure out what to do on record. Maybe that's why I haven't done one on my own. I'm partly brainwashed by the whole aspect of the business—that there's something expected of me. What if I did something totally off the wall that I personally enjoyed, and people thought something weird about me? In a way, I guess, it's exposing a side of yourself that is very difficult to expect anyone to understand in the slightest way. I'd rather not even expose myself or that type of music to any attack. You know how sometimes you can do something just for fun and people take it like it's your statement? I guess I don't even want anything to do with that whole thing. Do you understand?

GW To me, "Jump" was taking a chance—a keyboard tune from the guitarist of the Eighties.

VAN HALEN "Jump" was not a spontaneous jam. What I was talking about was that live-Cream, spontaneous thing. For one, it would take somebody with a hell of a sense of humor, and they'd have to be a musician to even get anything out of it. I'm talking total darkness concerning format—no form, no song structure, nothing. Maybe someday...

ON THE ROAD

DAVID LEE ROTH WAS OUT, SAMMY HAGAR WAS IN, AND *GUITAR WORLD* WAS THERE WITH THE INSIDE SCOOP. BY STEVEN ROSEN

Reprinted from *Guitar World*, September 1986

GUITAR WORLD You seem so happy with the new band.

EDWARD VAN HALEN Dave always said I'm not happy unless I'm unhappy, so to speak. And that's a crock—I'm happy as hell and I'm coming up with some great stuff.

GW Will you ever look back at those years with Dave and regret that it all fell apart?

VAN HALEN Hell no. It was a blessing in disguise. When we get nominated for a Grammy and win, I'm going to thank him. [*laughs*] I'm serious.

GW Have you heard any of the music Dave's been working on?

VAN HALEN I hear it's good. [*Bassist*] Billy Sheehan is a bad mother—one of the best around.

GW They may have songwriting problems—Dave doesn't write, and Steve Vai doesn't write those types of songs.

VAN HALEN And Billy writes heavy metal riffs.

GW So he'll have to find outside writers.

VAN HALEN He already bought some tunes from Steve Lukather. Steve is such a nice guy, he actually asked me, "Hey, do you mind?" I said, "Hell no, I don't mind." Billy Sheehan kind of asked me the same thing. And I said, "What do you think? Dave just left the band and he wants the hottest guns in town to replace us." And he asked, "Well, hey, we're still friends, right?" And I said, "Sure, I don't care. I got no beef with you." Actually, I've got no beef with Dave either—it's just that he really hurt me. You know? That's what it boils down to, and that's why I was so pissed off in the very beginning. At the height of our career—you work at something for so long, and all of a sudden someone just pulls the plug on you. That's kind of cruel.

GW Did Dave really pull the plug?

VAN HALEN Yeah, he quit! We weren't getting along, but we never did, basically.

GW Didn't you want to leave the band several years ago?

VAN HALEN Yeah, four years ago. During *Fair Warning*. I wanted to quit, but I stuck with it, and that's what burns my ass even more. If I would have quit then I wouldn't have spent an extra four years putting up with his attitude. I mean, hey, the guy's creative, okay? But he's a lousy human. Trying to live with the guy on tour… You ask anybody that's gone on tour with us, and they'll tell you he'd yell and scream for his apple in the morning. Or ransack people's rooms for the *Playboy* somebody borrowed the night before.

GW Power trips?

VAN HALEN Oh yeah. And Noel Monk [*the band's manager at the time*] was his goddamn puppet—did everything he wanted. And that's partly why Al and I wanted to change; we wanted a manager who managed the band—not someone who did only what one person said.

GW Had you left during *Fair Warning*, it would have been…

VAN HALEN …different, sure. Well, let's put it this way: The end result is, I'm very happy now. Whatever it took to get where I am now, I'm very happy.

"DAVE'S A CREATIVE GUY—BUT HE'S A LOUSY HUMAN."

GW Was "Dreams," from the new album, played on the MIDIed piano?

VAN HALEN Yeah, I think so. We never even got to work with Dave on that; we rehearsed maybe for a total of a week within a month's time.

GW So he had heard some of the new material?

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah, I had "Good Enough" and "Summer Nights," and we'd begun work on "Dreams."

GW It appears from *5150* that your writing has moved in new directions.

VAN HALEN It's constantly changing, I guess. I don't really know where inspiration comes from—or where anything comes from.

GW Was there any worry about the ideas not being there?

VAN HALEN Oh, not at all. The way I feel about it is, Sammy and I are in tune with each other. I have to say that, often, opposites will attract. Dave and I were completely opposite in our backgrounds and music, our musical styles and what we enjoyed listening to. And sometimes that works. The friction creates something.

GW Like with the Who?

VAN HALEN Yeah, but there Pete Townshend writes everything. With Sammy, we're the same—and it seems to work better. So the theory that opposites attract is not valid in this case.

GW Did you listen to many singers before finding Sammy? I know you listened to [*Australian vocalist*] Jimmy Barnes.

VAN HALEN And he's doing well. I got a tape from him, and

LARRY MARANO/LFI

Kramer

it's the same record he has out now. I don't know; he's a great singer, but I didn't think he was right for the type of music that I write.

GW Did you think that having Hagar in the band would make it sound like Sammy Hagar's band? As opposed to some unknown vocalist?

VAN HALEN I think Sammy Hagar's work on this record is like nothing he's ever done. No, I never thought we would sound like Sammy Hagar, because I'd be writing the music, and my music doesn't sound like Sammy Hagar music. I pulled some vocals out of him where even Sammy kind of flipped and said, "Whoa, I didn't know I could do that." I guess we pushed each other.

GW Was Mick Jones important in that area?

VAN HALEN I produced all the vocals with Sammy except for "Dreams," because Mick was on tour. Mick helped out a great deal in organizing things. You know how I am—"Hey, let's work on this today. Nah, let's work on that." Or whatever. He really helped pull it all together and polish it up, so to speak. Mick changed a few things and he offered a few ideas. He and I wrote "Dreams" with Sammy. The song was completely different than it is now. Originally, what is now the verse part was actually a part of the solo section. The same parts were still there but they were juggled around. And he tore a hell of a vocal out of Sammy on that one. Mick is great to work with, a nice guy. We call him "The Duke." A proper English guy.

GW How did you meet him?

VAN HALEN I met him through Sammy at the MTV Awards. Now, it's in our contract that Warner Bros. has the right to refuse producers. I wanted the band to do it by ourselves with Donn, and they said, "No." So what we did was, we went ahead and did the whole record anyway, and then brought Mick in and had him kind of oversee it. But I think Warner knows now that I'm not the flake that I've been reputed to be.

GW Billy Gibbons had a similar experience—no one was sure about the idea of bringing synthesizers into ZZ Top, and he just asked for a chance to be heard. I think they believe him now.

VAN HALEN Yeah. [*Warner Bros. production executive*] Lenny Waronker was a great help. He came down and heard stuff that we were doing, and he was flattened—floored. He said, "Whoa, I didn't think you guys could pull it off." After he heard a couple of cuts he said, "Go for it," even before Mick showed up. Then he began to trust us.

"SAMMY BOUGHT A HOUSE TWO DOORS AWAY FROM ME AND WE GET ALONG GREAT. IT'S LIKE WE'VE KNOWN EACH OTHER ALL OUR LIVES, REALLY. VERY CLOSE."

GW How come you're not working with Ted Templeman anymore?

VAN HALEN Actually, he came to one rehearsal. We showed him about four or five tunes. He made notes and everything, but he had a commitment to Dave. He didn't know when he was going to be working with Dave, and it just so happened that we wanted to start—we wanted to get rolling. I got sick of sitting on my ass. It's funny that Dave says we wanted to sit on our butts and stay at home and not tour and not work. I sat on my thumbs waiting for him for eight months, and I didn't want to wait another month to start recording. And Ted said, "I have a previous commitment," and we said, "Okay, fine, see ya later." It wasn't like we split. I'm not saying we'll never work with him again; it wasn't that type of thing. Ted is great, but he took Dave's side. But it was obviously because he committed himself to Dave after his *Crazy from the Heat* thing.

GW Perhaps Ted has more control over Dave than he does over you.

VAN HALEN Oh, sure, yeah. With us he'd have to put up with me. [*laughs*] Which I don't know if he's into too much.

MARK WEISS

GW Logistically, then, if Ted could have produced both the Roth and Van Halen albums, you would have agreed to that?

VAN HALEN [*pauses*] Probably, yeah…I don't know, it's hard to say. Put it this way, he was our number one choice because, obviously, he knows me and Alex and Mike and Sammy very well [*Templeman produced Hagar's* VOA *album and the Montrose records*]. And he and Donn have worked together for years. So it just seemed like a logical thing. Whatever differences there may have been, it could have worked. At least from my end.

GW I get the impression that you wanted to be more involved in *5150*.

VAN HALEN Oh, sure. The way we did this record is basically how I would like to have done all the previous ones. And I think that's another thing that maybe drove Dave away. For *1984*, I built the studio, and began wanting to do things a little more my way. I guess I turned some people off; I created a little friction, though unintentionally. I built the studio for the benefit of all of us, for the family, for the band. But I guess certain people didn't look at it that way, because Ted sure didn't dig working up there. Even though he loves the sound of the place, he just kind of looked at it like if I got pissed at him, I'd kick him out of my studio. [*laughs*] Though I'd never do that. If anything, Dave is the one who did that.

GW Do you wish you could've worked with Dave the same way you do with Sammy?

VAN HALEN I don't know. I don't know if I could have gotten out of Dave what I can get out of Sammy. I don't know if this is slandering Dave, but Sammy is just a better singer; he can do anything I ask him to do. Whereas Ted has a much better handle on what to get out of Dave, because Dave is kind of limited, vocally—range-wise and stuff. I don't know if that's a bad thing to say. I don't know how that is going to look in print. But I mean, hey, Dave has a unique voice and a unique style and also has a very strong idea of what he wants. So does Sammy, but I just pushed him a little further. Gave him a little confidence and said, "Hey, hit this note." And he'd go even higher than the note I asked him to hit. He'd be blown away and it would be great.

GW Did the fact that Sammy had greater facility than Dave lead to a change in your approach to writing songs?

VAN HALEN Sure. Like in "Why Can't This Be Love?" there is this part [*sings the middle part where the voice doubles the keyboard*]. I would never have attempted to ask Dave to do that.

GW The *5150* sessions felt good with Sammy?

VAN HALEN More than anything. He's changed my life. Seriously. He bought a house two doors away from me and we get along great. It's like we've known each other all our lives, really. Very close.

GW Why wouldn't Dave allow himself to be a friend?

VAN HALEN I don't know. Well, in the beginning I guess we were, kind of. But he was always too much into being a star. And that is what he is. I'm a musician, he's a star. A musician doesn't want to go and write, direct and star in his own movie. We were really just different people. Sammy and I are a little more the same. A little more human, so to speak. [*laughs*]

GW Is the feeling in the band now similar to what you experienced during the very early days of Van Halen?

VAN HALEN Dave pretty much always had that edge to him—that attitude. I don't know where it came from—insecurity, or having to prove something to his peers. But he always had that uncomfortable kind of attitude of never letting his guard down and opening up and actually letting you inside him. Sometimes I wouldn't know what kind of mood he was in. He's so moody sometimes that you only converse when he wants to. Whatever. Not much more about him, okay?

GW Okay. Getting back to the music, did you really meet Sammy through Claudio [*Edward's and Sammy's mechanic, who is pictured at the outset of Hagar's "I Can't Drive 55" video*]?

VAN HALEN Yes. Claudio gave me his phone number. He's a friend; I hang out at his shop sometimes to talk about cars. And I told him, "Hey, man, our singer left, he quit." And he said, "Hey, well, I just talked to Sammy today and he's coming to town." So he gave me Sammy's number and I called him up.

GW What was Sammy's reaction to the call?

VAN HALEN He said, "Wow, this could be something!" He wanted to come down to meet us first and see what kind of condition we were in. Because he'd heard some horror stories about my being…way out there, a space case. And he came down and said everything he heard through—well, I won't name any names—but he said, "Man, what's with those people? Why are they talking dirt about ya?"

He came down with Ed Leffler, his manager. We said, "Hey, we want a band, we don't just want to do a project with you. We want you as a permanent member of the band." First we had a little business meeting, just because he wanted to know what we wanted—to see whether it was like the album he did with Neal Schon, or what. We told him we wanted a permanent member. He came down the next Monday and we jammed, and that was it. The first tune we did was "Summer Nights." And from then on it was just straight up. In 20 minutes we had a complete song.

GW Was the energy similar to the feeling on *Van Halen*?

VAN HALEN I can't compare two totally different worlds, totally different atmospheres. Better. In the very beginning, the first album, I was very intimidated by never having been in a studio—it was all new to me. I learned over the years what I want and how to get what I want.

GW *5150* sounds more crafted than I thought it would be; I expected it to be…

VAN HALEN Rawer?

GW But if you examine it, it is the next logical step up from *1984*.

VAN HALEN I wouldn't say more "crafted"; crafted, to me, sounds like put-together. I'd say it's a little more polished, a little shinier. But not for the purpose of being more mainstream; that just happened to be the music I wrote. And that's the way it transferred to tape. I'm not about to deliberately screw something up to give it an edge. Everything has that garage-band energy, but it's polished—we haven't lost that rock and roll soul.

GW Was it an easy album to make, in terms of putting the songs together and knowing when they were right?

VAN HALEN A breeze. Beautiful. We never

EDDIE VAN HALEN on...

"WHY CAN'T THIS BE LOVE?" (*5150*)

"I wrote that on an Oberheim OB-8 keyboard in my bedroom. It was one of the first songs where Sammy said, 'You don't mind if I follow your keyboard melody, do you?' And I said, 'No, not at all,' though, in general, I don't really like the vocals to follow my instrumental lines. I'd much rather have the vocal line act as counterpoint. Our conceptual goal was to put lyrics and a melody over [*sings the first four notes of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5*]. You know what I mean? What would you sing over that? But that would be the shit if it could be done. And that to me is the essence of a great and complete song: great music that stands on its own, great melodic music, great counter-vocal melody and great lyrics. And of course a good performance."

"DREAMS" (*5150*)

"That's the one song Mick Jones of Foreigner helped us produce. Mick was supposed to produce the whole *5150* album because Warner Bros. didn't trust us to do it on our own. But Foreigner were on the road while we were recording, so Mick really wasn't around much. So we would say, 'Yeah, Mick's here producing.' In the meantime, I produced Sammy's vocal and Donn and I engineered. Mick got the credit, but *5150* was really a band-produced effort."

NEIL ZLOZOWER

put anything down and then decided to change it. We'd write a tune, put it down, and say, "Yeah, that's it." We might've edited a few spots if a part was too long, but the elements were there.

GW Some time ago, you said you knew that whatever you did would be judged by what you had done. Did this make you nervous when you were recording *5150*?

VAN HALEN Oh, sure, it gave us all a little more *ooomph*. Made us try a little harder.

Donn Landee (left) with EVH

GW With regard to the session, were the keyboard parts recorded before the guitars?

VAN HALEN Yes, I did all the keyboards first, alone, and then Al put down drums and Mike overdubbed bass. And then I overdubbed guitar. On "Love Walks In," I played by myself without a beat at all. Seriously. Ask Donn. It was tough for Al but I wasn't that far off. I wanted the chorus part to retard a little bit, and you can't do that with a click track—it would've sounded too robot-like. So Donn and I said, "Forget it, we'll just wing it," and Al managed to play to it. "Dreams" was done with a click track. I used an old 1912 Steinway seven-foot B Grand MIDIed to an Oberheim OB-8.

GW Is that an acoustic guitar at the beginning of "Dreams"?

VAN HALEN Yeah. It's a new Kramer Ferrington acoustic guitar with a thin body and an electric guitar neck on it. They sent me the first one. It sounded great, so I had to use it on something.

GW Did you use the Steinberger guitar on the album?

VAN HALEN Yeah, with the Trans-Trem. I used that on "Summer Nights" and "Get Up." It's an amazing guitar. You can hit a whole chord with a whammy bar and it will go up or down in tune with itself. So "Get Up" sounds like I'm playing slide, but I'm actually using the wiggle stick.

GW You were initially wary of the guitar, I understand.

VAN HALEN Well, that was because I'm used to a piece of wood, and this thing is like plastic. It was kind of alien to me. I had to change a few things to make it sound right. For instance, I had to use my amp differently—I had to use a bassier input. But I talked to Ned [*Steinberger*], and he made some different pickups. They're still EMGs, but they're a little warmer-sounding than the ones he sent to me.

GW I noticed that the solos on the record sound kind of angry.

VAN HALEN Angry? Maybe subconsciously, I don't know. But I think they're just sleazy. Kind of slimy-sounding—you never know where they're going to go. They just slip and slide. It's like the old "fall down the stairs and hope you land on your feet" thing. Whatever fits.

GW Yet the solo on "Love Walks In" is so lyrical.

VAN HALEN Yeah, I planned that out. I had a melody in my head and it happened to fit. So I said, "What the hell? I might as well use it."

GW Does Sammy play any guitar on *5150*?

VAN HALEN No, I played all the guitars. Live, though, he does the solos on the keyboard tunes.

GW Years ago, didn't Ted Templeman want Sammy Hagar to be Van Halen's singer?

VAN HALEN I remember hearing something like that. The thing is, Dave has always hated Sammy. I never understood why. We did some shows together—the Oklahoma Jam, and Anaheim Stadium with Black Sabbath and Sammy Hagar—and I always went over and said hi to Sammy because I dug him from his Montrose days. And Dave would always talk shit about him: "Ahhh, that little mother, he ain't got nothin' on me." And I'd wonder, Where's that even coming from? Why the animosity? And what Dave says is true—they never even met. Sammy never said a bad word about Dave until Dave started saying shit about him in the English press. I never knew where he was coming from; probably a slight case of jealousy.

"I BUILT THE 5150 STUDIO FOR THE BENEFIT OF ALL OF US, FOR THE FAMILY, FOR THE BAND. BUT I GUESS CERTAIN PEOPLE DIDN'T LOOK AT IT THAT WAY."

GW I wonder what Van Halen would have been like with Hagar as the original singer?

VAN HALEN Ummmm, I can't speculate. Maybe Sammy would be doing a movie right now, and Dave would be in the band. [*laughs*] You never know. Seeing how Sammy is blonde, too, we—Alex, Mike and I—figured our purpose was to make lead singers into actors, movie stars. It's just a joke.

GW *5150* is your first Number One album—how does it feel?

VAN HALEN It shows me that music overpowers bullshit. Dave and I wrote a lot of good stuff and made a lot of good music together, but I guess the clowning and the show biz part of it only works and helps so much. What's on that tape is what counts. Bottom line. And our going Number One proves that.

GW Then you think that coming off a huge album like *1984* would not have ensured success had you made a poor album?

VAN HALEN It would have bombed. But I think we made a good record—a solid record. There's not a song on there I don't like. On previous records there were tunes like "Dancing in the Streets." Come on! That's not me. A funny thing, though: We've played it live—on guitar. Just for fun. We did that in South America when we toured. Maybe. If I'd played it on guitar on the record it would have been better. The riff on the record actually was taken from a song of my own, that I was in the midst of writing. Ted heard it and said, "Hey, let's use it for that."

GW Looking back, what moments stand out for you? Was *1984* one of the high points?

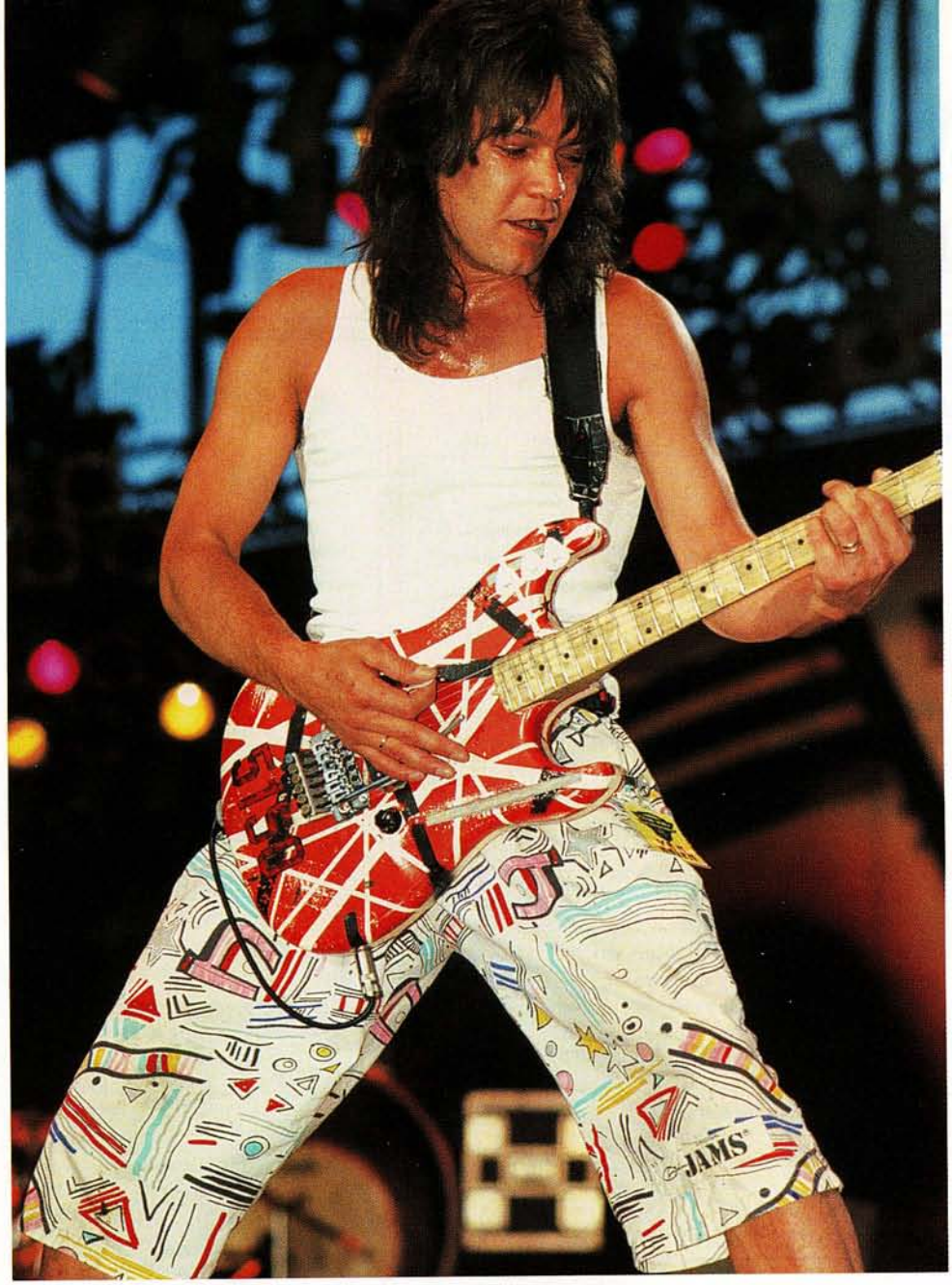
VAN HALEN It was both a very high and a very low point, emotionally, for me. Since it was recorded at my house, I got a lot of flak from producers and from Dave. In a way, that made me work harder, and, in a way, it turned me off to working with those people. So what I did was work at night after everyone split, and then the next day play stuff for them. They're the type of people who, I guess, like to work from noon to 6 P.M., break for dinner, go to sleep at 11, and wake up at noon again. You know what I mean? I'm not that type of person. And they knew that all along. So I guess it scared the crap out of 'em when I built the studio. Because, hey, I'd wake up at five A.M. and want to play. If an idea pops in my head, I want to put it down. You don't put off an idea until tomorrow. I basically wanted to work when I wanted to work, or when I *could* work. I can't just flick a switch on like Dave obviously can. I can't do it that way—at least not creatively.

GW But after *1984* came out and they saw what you were capable of, wouldn't they allow you more control?

VAN HALEN I don't know. I think it scared them more. I don't think they were ready to work with me under those conditions again. I think it was that, along with getting rid of our manager, that made Dave just say, "Well, screw you guys, I'm taking off, too." But we didn't do anything wrong. Alex and Mike and I were just sitting there saying, "Whoa! I thought we were doing great. What the hell is going on?" Here was Noel, our manager, suing us. What happened was, he wanted to renegotiate. He sent us a letter saying, "I want more money." We said, "Let's negotiate," but he wouldn't accept our offer. So we didn't fire him, he quit. And since Dave and he were so tight, so to speak, when Noel split he must have really felt he had no more control over me, Alex and Mike. Particularly since Al and I started opening our mouths for a change and were sticking up for what we thought was right. *1984* proved we were right, and so did this new one—not that we were even out to prove anything.

GW *5150* has more keyboards than any

NEIL ZLOZOWER



RICK GOULD

album you've ever done, and it's been the most successful.

VAN HALEN And what's funny is that Dave was basically against keyboards. Like Billy Gibbons and his, "Hey, you're a guitar hero, nobody wants to see you play keyboards." They had a mental block.

We never even got together long enough to see what he would have come up with for the stuff I was writing. He was too busy doing interviews for his solo career when we had a record to make. He'd call up and say in a gravelly voice, "Ah, I can't make it today, man," and I'd call the office and he'd be doing interviews.

GW What did you think of *Crazy from the Heat*?

VAN HALEN I think it was a novelty item. He didn't write any of it—it's full of songs written by other people. In my mind that's an easy way out, because the songs he did have been hits already. Ted has always said, "Hey, when you redo a hit you're halfway there, because the song's been proven." But that's not my way of thinking; I like to do my stuff. That isn't to say I like my own stuff better. But if you have ideas, why be a bar band—why not take a shot at your own stuff? I had enough of playing other people's music in clubs for seven years. Now that I have the chance, I want to do my own now.

GW You made a Number One album with no videos.

VAN HALEN Yeah, that's true. The reason was that we didn't have time to do even one. And on top of that, my main reason was that since Van Halen used to do such extravagant, loony videos, I didn't want people judging the new face in the band and the new unit by what they saw on some script. I wanted people to see us as we are onstage first. After it was known what we were about, then we could goof off and do whatever we wanted in videos.

Warner Bros. and everyone else wants a video out of us. Our next single is going to be "Dreams." We won't have the time to do a video for that unless we do a live one, so that's probably what we'll have to do. Live is actually the best way to go—it presents us the way we are, not engaged in doing some goofy stuff. The goofy stuff is fun to do, but we didn't want people to get their first impression of us that way.

GW Do you see yourself doing some outside producing?

VAN HALEN Sammy asked me to produce his next solo album. And it's going to be fun. I dig working with Sammy, it's great. We come up with stuff so quickly, it's incredible. And he can step out a little and do all kinds of stuff—like writing folk tunes on acoustic guitar. Show a side of himself other than the Red Rocker.

GW Will the next album show that side?

VAN HALEN Yeah. One thing Sammy's record won't be is anything like Van Halen. I'm not going to write or play on it; I'll just produce. Because if I write and play, it would sort of sound like Van Halen. And it's not a Van Halen record. I don't want anyone to have the impression that it is—or that he left the band and we're looking for another singer.

GW Speaking of outside projects, did anything ever come of your desire to work with Pete Townshend?

VAN HALEN I feel really bad about that. I think Pete Townshend is really pissed off at me. We talked—actually he never called—but he sent telegrams. I tried calling him back, and he telegrammed to say he doesn't like to work in the States, that he wanted to work in England. That kind of threw me a curve, because I was kind of planning to do it in the studio at home. But that wasn't the main reason. He wouldn't have been able to start until November of last year because he was doing his book and his solo album [*White City*]. I was tired of waiting to do something. Also, here are Alex and Mike, who I love, and who are my friends, and who I've been with for years—I couldn't exactly just leave them out. Pete and I never really discussed how to approach the thing, whether it would be Alex and Mike and me or what. I just hope he's not mad at me because I never got hold of him to tell him, "Sorry, I can't do it." I lost his number. I tried to call Phil Chen, who originally got the number for me, and I lost his number, too. You know what a slob I am. I write something down on a matchbook and I light a cigarette and throw the pack away. So, Pete, if you read this: I apologize.

GW Weren't you also trying to work with Patty Smythe?

VAN HALEN I actually hit her up to possibly join the band and be our lead singer. I just bounced the idea off her. She wasn't sure she could deal with three guys, or something along those lines. And she has a happening solo trip.

Another thing *(might as well jump to page 64)*

UNLAWFUL CARNAL RIFFAGE

SEVEN SHINING RHYTHM GUITAR MOMENTS FROM VAN HALEN'S VAST CATALOG OF RAUCOUS RIFFS. BY MICHAEL MUELLER

"Little Dreamer" (*Van Halen*)

In 1978 Eddie, his brother Alex, bassist Michael Anthony and audacious vocalist David Lee Roth turned the rock world on its ear with their eponymous debut, *Van Halen*. Produced by Ted Templeman, the record became the new standard for guitar-based rock—a pounding rhythm section, an honest-to-goodness guitar hero, and a wild frontman who lives for the spotlight. *Van Halen* soon had guitarists both young and old runnin' down the devil to sell their souls for the proficiency to play "Eruption."

By the time you get through the fretboard fireworks of the aforementioned "Eruption," as well as such tracks as "Runnin' with the Devil," "You Really Got Me," "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love," "Jamie's Cryin' " and "Feel Your Love Tonight," the laid-back minor-blues vibe of "Little Dreamer" **(FIGURE 1)** is just what the doctor ordered.

"Beautiful Girls" (*Van Halen II*)

Has a song ever had a bigger social or cultural impact than the deeply moving "Beautiful Girls" **(FIGURE 2)**? Seriously, though, you have to wonder if Diamond Dave was listening to Aerosmith's "Walk This Way" when he came up with the vocal melody and phrasing. The rhythm section swings hard on this tune, and Eddie's main riff grooves like nobody's business. Notice how he uses the old-time blues rhythm playing technique of fretting the low E string with the thumb (on the F# note).

NOTE: FIGURES 1-4 are all performed on a guitar tuned down one half step.
All notes and chords in these excerpts sound one half step lower than written.

FIGURE 1 "Little Dreamer" intro

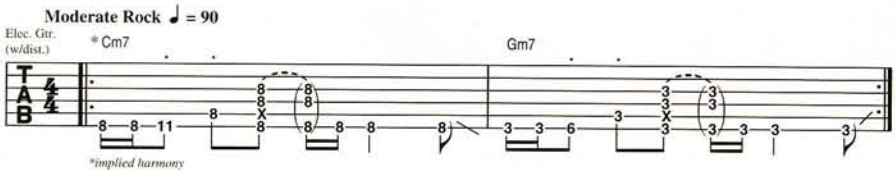


FIGURE 2 "Beautiful Girls" intro

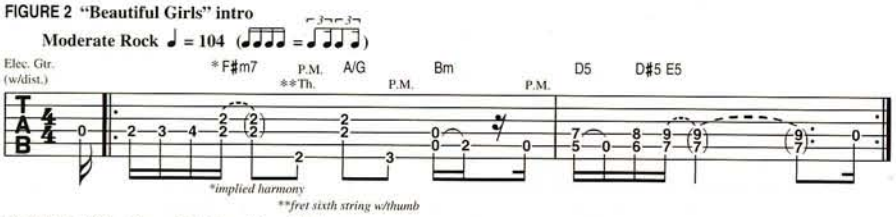
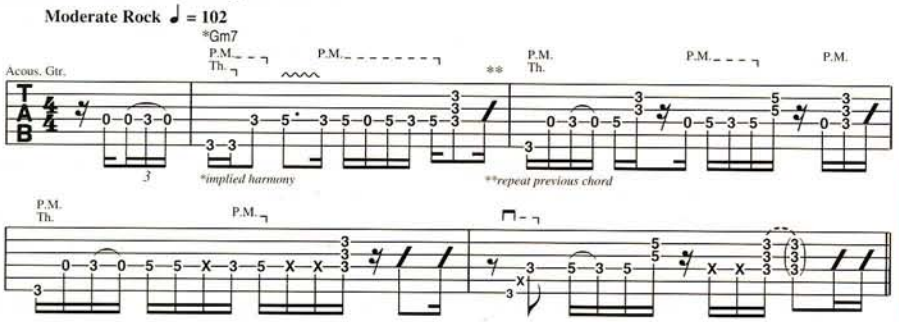


FIGURE 3 "Take Your Whiskey Home" intro



Reprinted from *Guitar One*, June 2002

ROSS HALFIN

LITTLE DREAMER
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ROSS HALFIN

The band followed up its instantly classic debut with the equally rockin' *Van Halen II*. Though some critics felt the songwriting didn't quite reach the bar they had set so high on their first effort, Ed's guitar genius flows forth with each note on the record, especially on this tune, the album's closer. Although "Beautiful Girls" didn't reach great heights on the charts, it nonetheless became, and remains to this day, a beach-cruisin' classic.

"Take Your Whiskey Home" (*Women and Children First*)

The release of Van Halen's third record, *Women and Children First*, saw Eddie continue to amaze and amass guitar disciples, and David Lee Roth project a crazier image than ever. Though the album lacked some of the firepower of previous releases, there were still plenty of highlights, including the laid-back yet heavy-hitting "And the Cradle Will Rock..." and the blues-rock salvo "Take Your Whiskey Home" **(FIGURE 3)**. The latter's catchy acoustic intro, Diamond Dave's Delta-style delivery of the opening lyrics, the balls-out guitar of the main riff and the Jimmy Page–style solo breaks comprised the recipe for rock and roll. As he does with the main riff to "Beautiful Girls," Van Halen uses his thumb to fret a note on the low E string in this riff, in this case G.

"Mean Street" (*Fair Warning*)

Following the relatively tame outing on *Women and Children First*, Ed returned to guitar-hero status on *Fair Warning* in 1981. One needs only to listen to the first 30 seconds of the album's opener, "Mean Street," to hear what we're talking about. Reminiscent of the Rolling Stones' excursion to the funky side of rock and roll, this tune exemplifies the funk-rock quadrant of Van Halen's musical brain. **FIGURE 4** depicts the song's minor pentatonic, syncopated 16th-note riff. Notice how Eddie utilizes the superlative timbre of the open strings in this riff (for the G chord), in a way not unlike his verse riff to "Jamie's Cryin'," as well as his use of well-placed natural harmonics (N.H.).

Interestingly, a young, Van Halen–influenced rock band called Extreme would make this type of funk-rock their calling card in the early Nineties—and singer Gary Cherone would eventually take the stage with Ed and the boys in the glittering footprints of Diamond Dave.

"Unchained" (*Fair Warning*)

Amongst all the funk rockers like "Mean Street," "Dirty Movies" and "Push Comes to Shove" on *Fair Warning* lies the original drop-D metal masterpiece, "Unchained"—a great song to test out that new flange pedal you've been coveting. The tune hits the ground running with arguably the thickest riff Ed has ever churned out **(FIGURE 5)**—reportedly his personal favorite.

FIGURE 4 "Mean Street" intro (0:34)

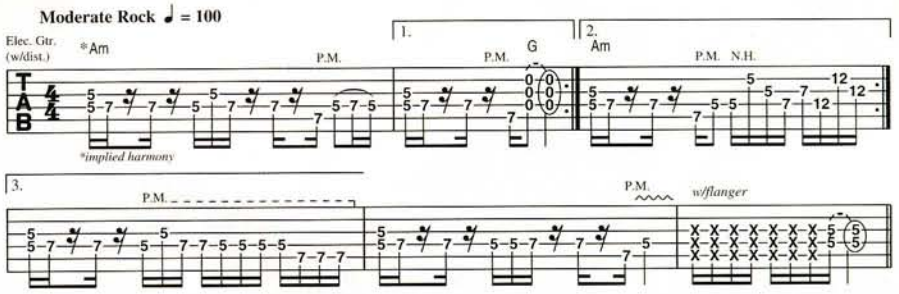


FIGURE 5 "Unchained" intro

Drop-D tuning down one half step (low to high: D♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ B♭ E♭)

All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written (key of D♭).

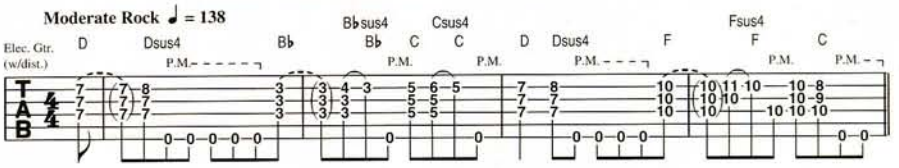


FIGURE 6 "Best of Both Worlds" intro

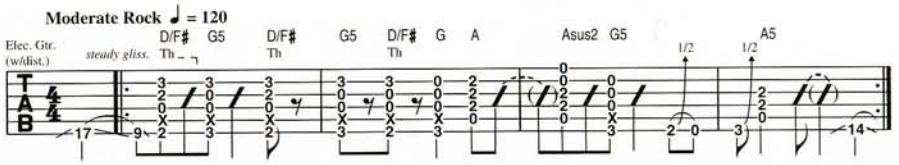
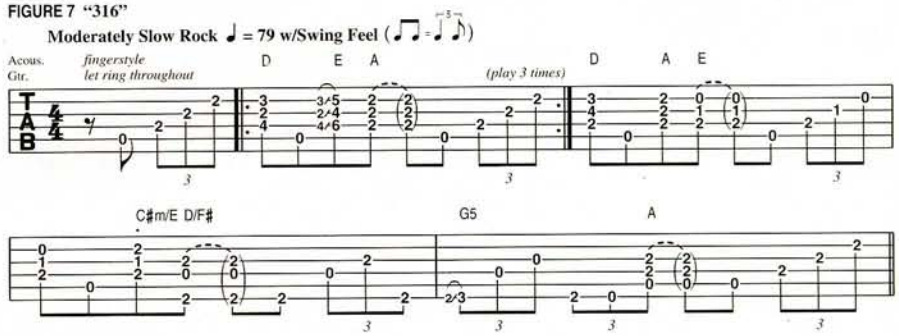


FIGURE 7 "316"



Van Halen begins the riff with a fifth-position D barre chord, fretted with his index and ring fingers, and adds a melodic "sus4" embellishment with his pinkie on the B string. He then proceeds to repeat the same move off of a B♭ chord, then C, then F, moving the barre chord shape up and down the neck to each chord's root on the A string. The final F-to-C move in measure 4 is another classic Van Halen chord change.

"Best of Both Worlds" (*5150*)

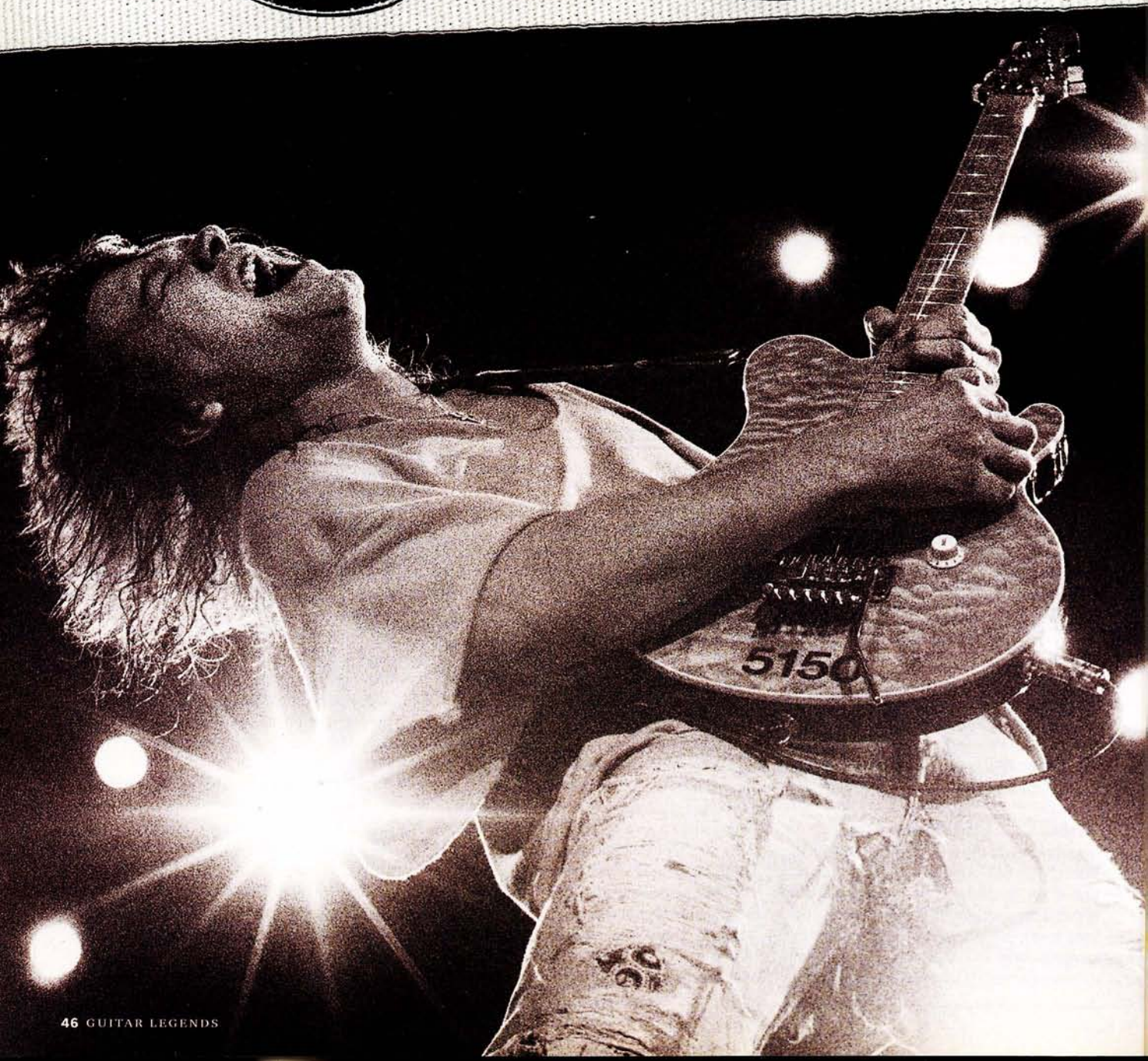
After the success of *1984*, the seams holding Van Halen together finally split. David Lee Roth left the band to pursue a solo career, releasing *Crazy from the Heat*, which spawned the enormously popular video hits "California Girls" and "Just a Gigolo/I Ain't Got Nobody."

In a somewhat surprising move, Van Halen tapped red rocker Sammy Hagar to take over the vocal reins. Best known previously for being unable to drive under the legal speed limit, Hagar immediately jelled with his new bandmates, and together they produced the band's first-ever Number One album, *5150*. Named after the New York police code for someone who's cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs—or after Ed's home studio (you pick)—the record kept Van Halen close to the hearts of their fans on the strength of hits like "Dreams" and "Love Walks In," as well as the more traditional guitar rockers "Why Can't This Be Love?" and "Best of Both Worlds," the intro to which is shown in **FIGURE 6**. Again, notice Van Halen's use of thumb-fretting on the low E string and the crushing power of open strings in his chord voicings.

"316" (*For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*)

No, it's not Stone Cold Steve Austin's theme music. Nor is it an ode to the Gospel of John. Rather, the beautifully arpeggiated "316" **(FIGURE 7)** was penned by Eddie in celebration of the birth of his son, Wolfgang, on March 16, 1991. Notice Ed's use of the fingerstyle technique to play the triplet arpeggio "rolls" in this figure. Be sure to assign a different finger to each string when playing this riff.

FEELS SO GOOD



ROCK'S OWN PETER PAN, EDWARD VAN HALEN has a muse that remains forever young and innocent. As his band's hit singles ride up the charts he remains removed from the games other people must play to make it. Starting with the *1984* album, when Edward took command of the band's music, he immediately hit paydirt with "Jump," a Number-One single based on a synthesizer riff, freeing him to explore any territory, including keyboards and ballads. A feeling-out period for introducing their new vocalist, Sammy Hagar, *5150* was a celebration of this freedom. Now with the establishment of his own 5150 recording studio, currently housing a new state of the art analog Studer board, money and time restraints from the record company are no longer in the picture.

AS *OU812* RACES UP THE CHARTS, EDDIE VAN HALEN DISCUSSES HIS BAND'S LATEST WORK AND HIS EVOLUTION AS A GUITAR GOD.

BY JOHN STIX REPRINTED FROM *GUITAR FOR THE PRACTICING MUSICIAN*, NOVEMBER 1988

His time is his own, as is his band. The resulting *OU812* shows Van Halen, the songwriter, at his most sophisticated ("Mine All Mine"), his most folksy ("Finish What Ya Started"), his most bluesy ("When It's Love") and in touch with his origins ("Source of Infection"). In the decade since the release of Van Halen's debut, EVH has steadfastly avoided thinking too much about his creative process, how it works, or whether it's changed or matured over the years. For him it's a gift to enjoy, a roller coaster ride with no long lines to endure before hopping on for another go 'round.

"To me rock and roll is being able to do what you want when you want, as long as you want," the 31-year-old guitarist states as his philosophy. "Our success means there are no rules. You don't have to wear a certain type of outfit. You don't have to play a certain type of music. You can do whatever you want. I can be a kid as long as I want to be. Music in general is freeform; it's basically from the heart and the soul. People get off on the element of whatever that reckless abandon is that we have. It's something I can't control. I can look at it as a blessing now, but in the old days when we were playing clubs, it actually stood in my way. I couldn't copy Top 40 tunes and make them sound like they were supposed to. Every song I played sounded like me, as opposed to the record. I used to think all the other bands were better than us because they could sound like the record. For the life of me, I couldn't. When we auditioned for dances we wouldn't get the gigs because we didn't sound like their favorite hit. We wouldn't get hired in the clubs because I couldn't make it sound right. The prime example is the Linda Ronstadt tune on *Van Halen II*, 'You're No Good.' I tried to learn it like the record. [*Producer*] Ted Templeman goes, 'What's that?' I go 'It's "You're No Good." ' He goes, 'It doesn't sound like it to me.' We put it on the record anyway."

ROBERT KNIGHT/RETNA LTD (OPPOSITE PAGE); MARK WEISS (THIS PAGE)

GUITAR FOR THE PRACTICING MUSICIAN Was there a jumping-off point when you recognized what you had as a guitarist?

EDDIE VAN HALEN Pretty much when I started writing my own stuff. It was kind of a slow progression. I can't really point out when I realized I was good or realized that I was different.

GPM Do you remember how confident you were?

VAN HALEN I was never really confident. I'm not really confident now. Confident in what way?

GPM That you liked what you were playing and you felt it was good for what you wanted to be.

VAN HALEN That didn't start happening until the *1984* album. I stepped out and did what I wanted to do, not what other people wanted. When it worked I felt pretty confident. That's where I think the records started sounding the way I wanted to and becoming more what I thought Van Halen should be.

GPM Did you study the blues?

VAN HALEN I didn't really study it. When I first started soloing those were just the simplest, easiest notes to hit. When I stumbled onto it I thought, Hey, this is what they're doing in the blues. Great—I know those notes. And I just kind of expanded from there.

GPM There is now a pre and post Van Halen group of players based on that expansion. Did you know what you were doing was on the edge as far as building vocabulary?

VAN HALEN When I started using my pinkie and finding more spread things, that's when I started getting my own style. It wasn't a conscious thing. In the old days I only used the first three fingers, like Clapton and everybody else. It was actually my brother Al who told me to use my pinkie. It took a while to get my pinkie strong, but it was more a mental thing than a strength thing. I had to find new places to put it. I was so used to doing old blues licks with the first three fingers. That old idea seemed like excess baggage. I use my pinkie all the time now.

GPM What kinds of things bring you back to the same thrill of playing guitar that you felt when you started?

VAN HALEN Where does inspiration come from? I don't know. Maybe I've been spending so much time with keyboards that all of a sudden I needed the guitar again, though I never really thought it left. Sometimes I pick it up out of boredom. Sometimes I hear a song on the radio that inspires me to play. Valerie had a videotape of *Ordinary People* and hearing Johann Pachelbel's [*baroque piece*] "Canon" inspired me to start playing. Sometimes a good fight with the old lady will inspire me. Lots of times I think it's because it's the only thing I know how to do. Music is in my blood. I go out and I'm always doing it. I don't think I'm away from it that much to have to come back.

GPM Jeff Beck shares your passion for cars. Is there a correlation between guitars and cars?

VAN HALEN There is definitely an on-the-edge, silly speed kind of thing. It's basically that I'm still a kid. Racing cars isn't like music, but

then again Beck and I approach the guitar in kind of a spontaneous, over-the-edge kind of way. I think we approach the guitar that way because we're kids too. I always feel a sense of freedom when I'm soloing. No one ever told me I don't like your solos. I would say, "I don't like that one; let's do it again." They'd go, "Why?" I was looking for some kind of emotion and spontaneity in there.

GPM By the third take are you doing the same spontaneous thing or is each take a little different?

VAN HALEN I never try the same approach. If I'm overdubbing a solo I might try three or four and each one of them I'll start and finish completely differently. Then if I capture the magic that's what I go for.

GPM How do you prepare for a solo?

VAN HALEN I usually noodle in the same way a runner would loosen up. Obviously you don't want to pull a hamstring. I try and get my wrist feeling loose, so whatever pops in my head I can play. I already know the chord changes I'm going to play over. I usually have that in my head. I practice over them sometimes, but not usually, because I'm so bad at counting. I remember the solo in "Mine All Mine" I didn't know how long I was supposed to keep going. I didn't know when the end melody was coming up. I'm looking at Donn [*Landee, engineer*] and saying, "Now?" He's going, "Not yet." I'm going, "Give me a nod at the last time. I can't count for shit. I have no idea where I'm at." That's why I like soloing live, because then the guys watch me, and when I go, "Okay, end," that's when we all end. When I'm overdubbing I have to fit my solo into this framework. Sometimes it's difficult for me.

GPM Your spontaneous approach to live playing in the studio gave us the first Van Halen album, which even you call a classic. Do you think that's the way to make a record now?

VAN HALEN I still look at it that way. The only thing that's changed is now when we do an album, I write for it. When I write a song we approach it the same way as back then, except back then we had a bunch of songs already written. We just had to execute them and knock them out like that. Whereas now I don't have 25 songs in my pocket that we've already rehearsed. So we do the same thing except one song at a time.

GPM Songs take on a second and usually a better life live. You change things.

VAN HALEN Without even knowing you change it.

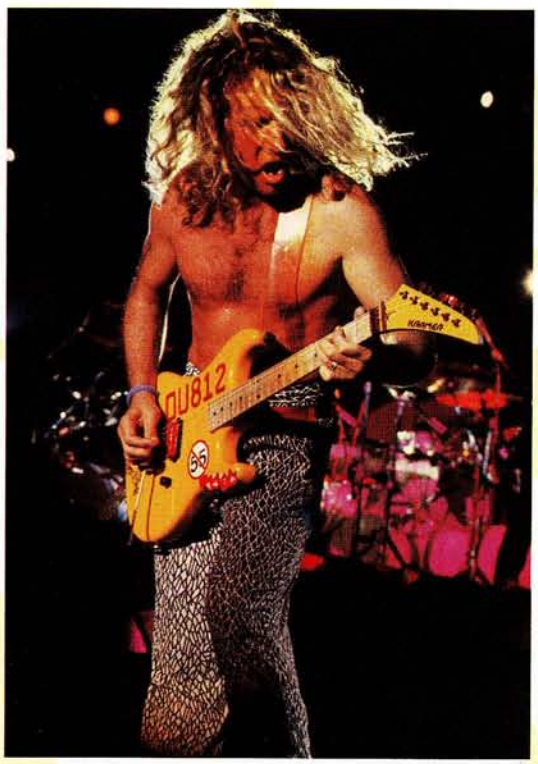
GPM Isn't that worth doing? The first album, as live as it was, was the most rehearsed album you've ever had.

VAN HALEN You're right, it was very rehearsed. It was to the point where we could play it in our sleep.

GPM If there's something positive to that, why not do that now?

VAN HALEN In a way we do, but you can only rehearse a three-piece song so much. You rehearse the structure. I never solo the same every time, because then it would get boring to me. Being on autopilot and not thinking about what you're doing has a positive thing to it. The thing is, after playing those songs for so many years we put them on record. We went on to play them and they still continue to change. If we recorded that album now, with songs we still play live, like "Ain't Talkin' 'Bout Love," it would still be different now than it was then. It's an ongoing thing and it depends on when you capture it.

"I DON'T THINK ABOUT SOLOING AS MUCH AS I DID ON OUR FIRST ALBUM."



GPM You don't take that spontaneous approach on the keyboards.

VAN HALEN Oh no, because I really don't know how to improvise. The keyboard is more of a thing where I have an idea in my head and I play it and that's it. I'm more limited on a keyboard, where I can't step out and wing it as much. If I could improvise like some jazz whiz I'd be doing all kinds of weird stuff.

GPM Wasn't learning piano easier than guitar?

VAN HALEN Because everything is right there. It's like you have 10 instruments at your fingertips too. You have voicings that are impossible to get on any other instrument. You don't have to make the note, but then again, a good touch makes a difference.

GPM Do certain keys mean something to you?

VAN HALEN For soloing I like the key of A for guitar. You can go an octave up or low or in between. I like F# and B. I don't like E. I think it's a mental block, because every one solos in E. I don't know what scales I play. I don't know if I'm playing major or minor until we start singing to it. Then we add harmonies and go, "Oh, that's minor."

GPM On keyboards you do a lot in C.

VAN HALEN D and C. D is a good key for me to play on piano, to improvise and noodle. Early on, when I was taught how to play piano, I never got to noodle. Around 1980 I started stepping out and getting back to the piano and starting to noodle a little bit and D just got to be the easiest key for me.

GPM Where is the biggest thrill in the life of a song?

VAN HALEN There are three places and they are all upon completion of the thing. When I've completed writing a song and I get the guys' approval. That's a hell of a high. When we actually get done recording and I hear it through the speakers. Then when we perform it live.

GPM That's over perhaps a six month period.

VAN HALEN The actual writing and recording is sometimes only a couple of days. I wrote "Cabo Wabo" and two days later it was recorded and done.

GPM How much give and take is there to the acceptance of a song? Is everybody a yes man?

VAN HALEN Yes, to a certain extent, because I'm the only one who comes up with stuff. I'm sure they're hesitant to say, "Hey Ed, that stinks." At the same time they do go, "I like that other one better."

GPM How complete are the songs when you bring them in?

VAN HALEN They are pretty much complete. I've got all the parts. I play it, sometimes on a tape. Usually I talk my way through it. I say, here is what this is, here is where it goes, and then I have a B section and we break down for the solo and then we go out of the solo here, and a breakdown before the rideout. I explain it all.

GPM What musical element do you start with when you write a song?

VAN HALEN The beat. I usually get a vibe in my head about a groove. That's what actually gets me off about a lot of stuff. Rhythms inspire me more than notes. It doesn't really come out in my music but that is what gets me going. Sometimes I'll have Al play a beat and I'll just jam to it. Depending on what kind of beat it is, I'll come up with different kinds of things. I dig Thomas Dolby. I love the

MARK WEISS

MARK WEISS

groove on "Pulp Culture." This groove inspires me. I get off on funk music. I remember seeing Mother's Finest at the Whisky. Their bass player was bad.

GPM Some days you have to write because of a deadline. There are other days when it pours out. As a musician who is going to record, it would be great if you could wait for those days.

VAN HALEN Yeah, but you can't. You can't sit around and wait. It doesn't always come all at once. Obviously when inspiration knocks you'd better be there to open the door. Sometimes you have to push it. "Feels So Good," on *OU812*, was a prime example of a song where I was stuck. I had the opening melody. I didn't know where to go for a verse. I was stumped and stuck with it and didn't come up with anything that I liked, so I put it away and we worked on something else. I came back to it and all of a sudden came up with a verse.

GPM Do you work on a keyboard and bring it over to guitar?

VAN HALEN I have. "Hear About It Later" on *Fair Warning* I wrote on keyboard and applied it to guitar. "And the Cradle Will Rock..." I wrote on guitar and put it on electric piano. On *OU812* and *5150*, whatever I wrote on keyboard I executed on keyboard.

GPM Along with your interest in keyboards there came an end to your research and development of guitar ideas. You stopped coming up with pieces like "Spanish Fly," "Eruption" or the intro to "Mean Streets." The paino style on the guitar is something you haven't recorded yet or played with for years.

VAN HALEN I just lost interest I guess. I think it might have stopped because I'm more content in writing songs. I'm happier doing what I'm doing than just being the guitar hero. I'm evolving a lot more in the production aspect. I guess when you're unhappy you have to step out and do other things to make yourself happy. I'm happy, so I don't need that satisfaction in having to say, "At least give me 30 seconds to do what I want." Now on a whole record I can do what I want. I don't have to have my little bursts that say "Screw you."

GPM So you saw those guitar pieces as a rebellion?

VAN HALEN I guess so.

GPM I loved the way you used TransTrem on *5150*, but was bummed that you didn't use it on *OU812*. I wanted to hear the next level of development.

VAN HALEN I just didn't use it to write. I was more into the keyboard stuff. There are three keyboard songs on that record. Those are my favorites. That's what I mean; I'm thinking songwise a lot more than I am solowise. All I can say is that people change. It's not a conscious thing. It could come around again. It felt great to blow live solos again on this record. *OU812* kind of felt like going back a little bit. For "Finish What Ya Started" and "Cabo," it was Mike and I in the console with my amp in another room so Al could have the drums in the main room. The only ones that weren't live were the keyboard tunes. That's not even true, I played them and Al played. What I mean is, there were overdubs on them. "Back and Blue" was done exactly the way all the songs on the first record were, straight through with solo. All the guitar songs on *OU812* were straight playing, live in the studio.

GPM There are more different guitar sounds on this record than in the past.

VAN HALEN That's because I used a lot of different guitars. For "Cabo Wabo" I used a 12-string electric. It was a Fender neck with a Schecter pickup configuration and body. I used a lot of Strats, my Kramer 5150 and an old Airline hollowbody guitar for slide on the Little Feat tune. That was Sammy's idea. I took a stab at playing slide and honky-tonk piano. That was such a fun song to record.

GPM Did you orchestrate with the keys and the guitar in mind?

"I HAD AN EMPTY FEELING [WHEN MY FATHER DIED], BECAUSE A LOT OF MY DRIVE WAS FOR HIM, TO MAKE HIM PROUD. IT WAS HIS NAME."

VAN HALEN The guitars were an afterthought on all the keyboard tunes. For "Mine All Mine" I wasn't thinking of doubling it with the guitar at all. Then I tried it and it sounded kind of neat. It's almost a direct kind of Strat sound. It's not real distorted. It's not my regular sound on the guitar. Live I use a sequencer and I play guitar over it. You hear more guitar than you do keys. I had three different guitars going, '59 Strats and my main Kramer.

GPM The solo on "When It's Love" has a Clapton vibe to it.

VAN HALEN I kind of like that. When I first started soloing to it, it ended up sounding like Clapton. It was intentional. I used a Strat full blown through Marshalls. The beginning of the song and before the second verse is backward guitar. I just hit a chord and Don flipped the tape over.

GPM What did you do for the intro to "A.F.U. (Naturally Wired)"?

VAN HALEN I'm tapping an octave above every note that I'm fingering with the left hand. It's my Kramer 5150 with no overdubs.

GPM "Cabo" is a 12-string with a flanger?

VAN HALEN No, it might have a little harmonizer on it, but I use that a lot. "A.F.U." also has harmonizer on it. It's just a straight 12-string in regular tuning through my Marshalls. In the mix we added a little echo. I used a wah in the solo. I didn't wah wah out. I worked it a little bit just to get a vibe. I took a couple of passes where I really used the wah wah and it sounded too ridiculous. This is the first time I've recorded with a wah.

GPM I love the sound of the keyboard on "Feels So Good."

VAN HALEN It's an OB-8 with an organ sound and my Kramer guitar for the solo.

GPM In the beginning of the solo it sounds like you play above the nut.

VAN HALEN I'm strumming on the other side of the nut. On "Runnin' with the Devil," where it sounds like a piano, it's the same thing.

GPM How did you come to do "Finish What Ya Started"?

VAN HALEN Sammy and I consciously tried to do something different. We said, "Let's get a funky sound on this one," and I finger-picked all the way through. I didn't use a pick at all. He played rhythm guitar on a Gibson acoustic. I used a Strat direct. I didn't use an amp. It's just E and A going back and forth. It's simple, but it had a groove. The solo sounds like a little country picking. This and "Feels So Good" we don't do live. Overall, I think it's our best album yet. I like every song on it.

GPM Didn't you like every song on *5150*?

VAN HALEN Yeah, but I didn't like the sound of everything. I didn't like all the drum sounds. It's a learning process. You take the ball and sometimes run the wrong way. I would have liked to have used more live drum sounds, real drums, as opposed to Simmons Drums on *5150*. I love the drum sound on "Cabo Wabo," which is more of a real drum sound.

GPM In Van Halen the drums are given more room to move.

VAN HALEN You're probably right. Al plays musically. He plays a lot different from most drummers. He's from the Ginger Baker school. The drums are more important in this band than in most.

GPM What do you see as the role of the bass in the band?

VAN HALEN You have to approach it like you're the bottom. You're not a solo instrument. You are there to accompany and make the other things shine and not overplay. It's easy to jump into Jack Bruce's live Cream

BOB LEAFE/STARFILE

style. Then it becomes a war, a friction element instead of an enhancing kind of thing. Bass is really not a solo instrument. I remember a long time ago, when our first album came out, I was sitting around with a bunch of friends. This girl said she saw four guys on the cover and all she heard was guitar, singing and drums. For me to try to explain the bass to this person was virtually impossible. I'm going, "Do you hear that thing that is sub everything else that makes you feel it?" She said, "I guess." You feel it, it's a vibe. It's a vibe instrument, unless you're playing a lot of slap stuff. If you're playing good lay-down-the-bottom bass, you really don't hear it upfront.

GPM After *5150* I heard comments that your songwriting was getting better but your guitar playing was not as interesting.

VAN HALEN I might have been thinking songwise more. I basically play what fits. I don't think about soloing as much as I did on our first album. It wasn't a conscious decision. I just did what I thought would make a good sounding record. I didn't change the way I was thinking between *5150* and *OU812* at all. I haven't changed anything since *1984*.

GPM When you do material are you at the peak of your powers as a player, or are you well within your level of ability?

VAN HALEN I think I put out to the best of my ability. I think it's ridiculous to consciously play five steps below your ability. I don't do that. At the same time, I might not be pushing the envelope.

GPM But you were at different times.

VAN HALEN I think my soul is in every song on the new record to the best of my ability. I'm not thinking, I want to lay back so I perform good. At the same time, when I'm happy with something I feel I've done it the best I can. I don't go, if I push myself harder something will happen.

GPM Do you feel you play better sober?

VAN HALEN People tell me that I do. I don't know. I'm just getting used to it now. I'm more nervous, so sometimes I have to think about what I'm doing more, which I don't like to do. When I used to get crocked and go out there and play, I'd be on autopilot, and sometimes I'd be more spontaneous, but I'm more consistent now.

GPM Looking at the live aspect of performing, it seems the more successful you are the further away you get from the optimum live conditions.

VAN HALEN That's very true. Onstage, even though it's huge, we're as tight as we want to be. I'm very close to Sammy and Mike at all times. I like interacting. I don't like being off on my own thing. The sound in the clubs used to be great. I used to find my sweet spot with my cabinet and I knew exactly where to stand for it to sound good.

GPM Everyone agrees Van Halen is better live than on record. So where is the live album?

VAN HALEN It depends on what you mean by better. Obviously, recording technique–wise, it's not going to sound better. You know that for a fact. There is a vibe; there is an excitement to it live and the spontaneous stuff doesn't happen as freely in a contained environment. But at the same time, live you're winging it, so you never know. Sometimes it could be 10 times worse, sometimes it could be a notch better. The safe way to go is to try it live in the studio, which is what we go for. What's the purpose of a live record unless you're going to do new songs live? But nobody would come to the live concert.

GPM How live was *Live Without a Net*?

VAN HALEN It's very live. Nothing got fixed except some background vocals. Sammy left all the lead vocals.

GPM How good was the performance?

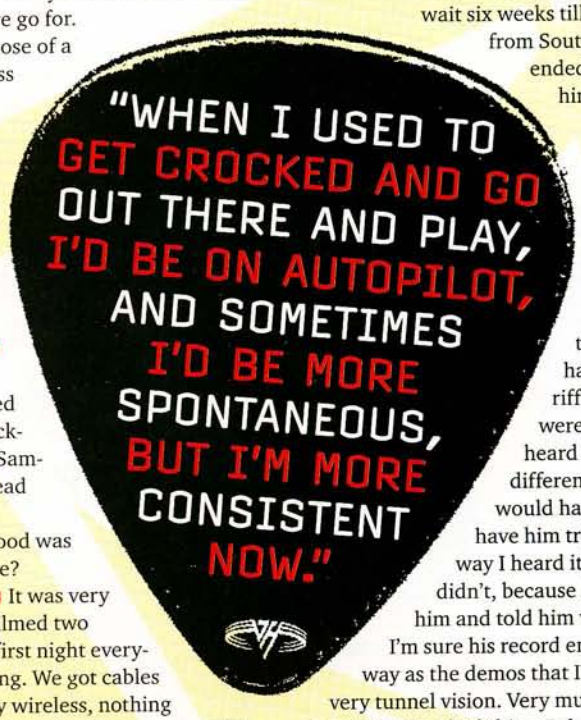
VAN HALEN It was very mediocre. We filmed two nights and the first night everything went wrong. We got cables crossed with my wireless, nothing worked. In order to save the expense of filming it, we said whatever happens tonight is going out. We wanted to make the best of it and not worry about it. I think we can do better.

GPM Do you have a favorite song in the set to play?

VAN HALEN "A.F.U." is a lot of fun. I like jamming "One Way to Rock," because Sammy is doing most of it and I play a couple of chords and get to noodle a lot. I have fun playing in every song. "Summer Nights" takes more concentration because of the wiggle stick. I hope I get the right notch this time. I've lost it and other times Sammy will bump my arm and knock it out of the pitch. If I jump too high it can pop out.

GPM Would you like to step out of Van Halen and play?

VAN HALEN I don't know. I wouldn't know until I'm in it. I've never really tried it. I'm pretty content doing what I'm doing. I'm not used to playing with other people. I've done it. At NAMM shows I'll get up and play with anybody. Steve Lukather and I have gotten down a couple nights in the studio. We were playing everything, bass, drums, and guitar. He can improvise like a mother. He is jazz taught. He does a gig at the Baked Potato in Los Angeles now and he's asked me to come play and I say, "I can't do that." He goes, "Sure you can." We got together and jammed, and I guess I can. I remember once at GIT Allan Holdsworth was doing a seminar and he asked me to come down and I said, "Me play with you, with your music?" He said, "Just wing it." I ended up doing it and it was great. That was really weird, totally blindfolded for me. I didn't know the song structure or where I was going. I was guessing and playing chromatically, hoping to land on my feet. I sure wish we could have worked together like we were supposed to. All he had to do was wait six weeks till I got home from South America. He ended up doing it himself.



GPM It was still a good record.

VAN HALEN I didn't hear much of it. I was almost afraid to listen to it because he had a couple of riffs that I thought were great and I heard them completely differently than he did. I would have just liked to have him try doing it the way I heard it. I know that he didn't, because I never talked to him and told him what I wanted. I'm sure his record ended up the same way as the demos that I heard, which are very tunnel vision. Very much Allan. I don't mean it was a bad thing, I think I could have possibly had him look at his music in a different way. He had this one riff that I hear like a Zeppelin tune. He heard it with brushes. It could have been neat. He can do amazing things that nobody can do on a guitar. It kind of pissed me off that I never got a chance to hear some of the things that I wanted to hear.

GPM Is that something that you'd still like to do?

VAN HALEN Sure.

GPM You've never been much of a big music listener for contemporary sounds.

VAN HALEN I bought some discs before we left on tour. I hate wasting money on records. *So*, by Peter Gabriel, is one of my favorite records. I've always liked Peter Gabriel. I was safe buying that because I knew what I was getting into. I have *Now and Zen*, but I haven't listened to it yet. I've always liked Robert Plant, too. I have Thomas Dolby's *Aliens Ate My Buick*. He does some off-the-wall stuff.

GPM While we're in the neighborhood, what are some of the great guitar albums that players should have in their collection?

VAN HALEN *Live at Leeds*, by the Who, is a great live album. *Wheels of Fire*, Cream, *Goodbye, One of a Kind*, by Bruford, *Van Halen*. In the same way that I think our first record is a good heavy metal guitar orientation, *Blow by Blow* by Jeff Beck is the epitome of a great classy instrumental record. Great sound, it's happening. *So*, by Peter Gabriel. I love Tony Levin. He is my man on *(might as well jump to page 64)*

Kramer

THE MONSTER OF ROCK

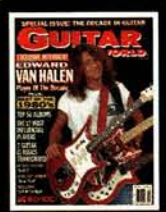
He sparked an Eruption—and an aftershock of monumental proportions: Edward Van Halen, *Guitar World*'s player of the decade.

by Joe Bosso

"Look at this mess!" Eddie Van Halen takes in the barren and dusty confines of the apparent wreck and ruin of 5150, his beloved recording studio/clubhouse. Where most men find rest and rumination in neighborhood bars, Eddie has for years sought refuge in this, his hang-out-joint to end all hangout-joints. Here he stays up late, pours back some Buds with his buds, and plays his videos. Here, too, he cranks it to hell and back, capturing bits of genius on two-inch tape.

But at this moment he couldn't nail a solo banjo track in here, let alone the monstrous sonic booms for which Van Halen is universally celebrated. 5150 is being remodeled, so everything's been stripped away, sawed-off, gutted. Amps, effects racks, consoles—all gone. Construction will take at least a few months to complete, at which time the dream-like studio will sport a new look and house, for the first time, a drum room. But on this picture-perfect Hollywood day, poor Eddie Van Halen looks like a man without a country.

"What are you gonna do?" he shrugs, accompanying *Guitar World* Associate Publisher Greg Di Benedetto and I out onto the driveway. "That's where we're building the new house." He motions across the small valley that lies between the Van Halens' modest (by rock star and TV actress standards) one-bedroom digs and their soon-to-be constructed palatial estate. Half-a-dozen workmen are engaged in various digging, pouring and pounding activities. The house glistens in the L.A. sun and, while unfinished, looks like an architect's dream. Eddie grins a grin as only he can, lights a cigarette and assesses the situation with characteristic amusement. "The thing's taking twice as long as it was supposed to, and it's costing six times as much!"



Reprinted from *Guitar World*, February 1990

EVH looks good: California-tanned, thinner than he's been in recent years and sturdy. He pads about the room, casually comfortable in beyond-baggy jeans, T-shirt and well-worn sneakers, with the cool, somewhat oblivious air peculiar to the mega-rich. For all that, it almost seems as if Eddie Van Halen is really just another guy, a bud—a dude. Perhaps that's how he likes it—as if the Porsches, Mercedes and Lamborghinis cluttering the driveway and parking lot could disappear tomorrow and it really wouldn't be that big a deal. Most successful rockers would take a journalist down to the wine cellar, but Eddie's idea of fun is showing off his motorized skateboard ("You can really clock yourself on the head when you fall off that thing at 35!"), or visiting his guitar room for a little stroll down memory lane.

"This place is a bit of a mess, too," he explains, running his hands along the bodies of guitar after guitar, as if to reacquaint himself with his collection of lovelies. "I don't usually keep 'em in cases because guitars are meant to be functional, you know?" [Later in the day, as we prepared to drive into downtown L.A. for a photo shoot, Eddie took his famous Frankenstein striped Strat and his 5150 guitars, among others, and tossed the whole bunch in the back of his pickup truck like they were two-by-fours. As each guitar landed with a loud thud, I gave Eddie a somewhat astonished, quizzical look. He simply grinned. "I don't use cases for these either!"]

"There's the Electro-Harmonix over there," he points to the keyboard just near the stairs. "I used that on 'Sunday Afternoon in the Park.' And there's the Destroyer I used to use," he says, pointing to one of the guitars hanging on the wall. "That was the one on *Women and Children First*. Oh, and here's what a VARIAC looks like!" Eddie's enthusiasm waxes as he holds up a harmless-looking electrical device that is most commonly used to dim wall lights. Eddie, of course, has for years routinely slapped them in his amps to better modify the voltage.

He ambles back outside where, plopped on a picnic table near the swimming pool, he reflects on a career that has not only brought him worldwide acclaim, fame and untold wealth but, more importantly, has forever changed the way people play and listen to the electric guitar.

Although it is difficult today to imagine modern rock guitar without Eddie's influence, surprisingly, when the group that bears his surname released their debut album in early 1978, they were perceived as something of a throwback. While most popsters were caught up in the minimalism of post-punk, with its arty blend of end-of-the-world nihilism and Euro-style detachment, along came this louder-than-loud Southern California band of party-crazed Gypsies, blowing up amps and pillaging any unsuspecting town in their path. Their equipment was crude and their songs were empty-headed supplications to the pleasures of limitless wine, women and song. At a time when Gary Numan and Kraftwerk were setting the trends and the electric guitar was taking a backseat to the synthesizer, it appeared that this band didn't stand a chance.

"Whether I tap or not, I'm still a good player."

Enter the round-cheeked Eddie Van Halen. As fast as he could unleash a flurry of dizzying harmonics, he tapped his way into our hearts, the first to infuse the electric guitar with genuinely new blood since Jimi Hendrix. For even if the young Van Halen's recording career had ended the moment he unplugged after tracking the seminal solo *tour de force* "Eruption," his place in the history of the electric guitar would have been assured. With this much-imitated instrumental, Van Halen single-handedly introduced the hammer-on to a generation of guitarists. Not only did "Eruption" serve to usher in an important, unconventional artist, it signaled the rise of something greater than that—it launched a movement. Overnight, the stakes were forever altered—and guitarists worldwide knew it seconds after their needles hit Van Halen vinyl.

In 1982 Eddie, by then an established rock star (a term he despises), received a call from producer Quincy Jones, who was working on a red-hot rock and roll track for a Michael Jackson album. Would Eddie come to the studio and lay down a solo? Sure, thought Eddie, why not? Might be fun. David Lee Roth had always frowned upon the idea of Eddie playing on other people's records, but hey, this was a Michael Jackson record, so Van Halen fans certainly wouldn't be interested—probably wouldn't even hear it. Eddie grabbed his guitar and split for the studio. Once there, he found that he liked what he heard, the driving song called "Beat It." The track was pretty much all there; Steve Lukather had recorded most of the guitars, and all that was needed was a solo—a hot one, to really make the tune cook.

After making the crucial suggestion that he solo over the verse section rather than the breakdown, as was originally planned, Eddie winged it. The solo would turn out to be Eddie's most popular and most analyzed work of the Eighties. All fired up, whooping and swirling, growling and shrieking, it is the product of a heart meeting a mind and connecting with the unknown.

It's a head-turner, all right, and for more than the obvious reasons. Eddie Van Halen was the perfect choice to play the solo, and his cameo spot on a Michael Jackson song carried repercussions that went far beyond guitar heroics. Until then MTV, still in its infancy, had maintained an unwritten rule against the airing of "black"-oriented videos. Although the network somewhat reluctantly agreed to air Jackson's "Billie Jean," it was a hollow victory, a response borne more out of record company pressure than popular opinion. But Eddie's star-turn on "Beat It" demolished the color barrier with stunning, decisive force. MTV had to respond. And it didn't end there. Suddenly, FM hard rock stations, which primarily catered to white suburbanites, were deluged with calls for "Beat It." Across the country, white males, who ordinarily would never dream of buying a Michael Jackson album, were doing so in record numbers. At the same time, black stations—the last places one would expect to hear searing, burning, heavy metal guitar—were wearing out their copies of "Beat It."

It seemed appropriate that Van Halen's brilliant and influential solo was the product of a whim. For this artist is—musically and personally—the personification of explosive spontaneity.

NEIL ZLOZOWER (OPENING SPREAD & ABOVE IMAGE)

Eddie sits back in his chair, lights another cigarette, and grins that grin. The greatest guitarist in the world is ready to talk about 10 incredible years gone by.

GUITAR WORLD What is the single thing you're most proud of having accomplished in the last decade?

EDDIE VAN HALEN I guess it's that I introduced and came out with a slightly different style, and that a lot of people have picked up on it.

GW The song "Eruption" changed everything practically overnight.

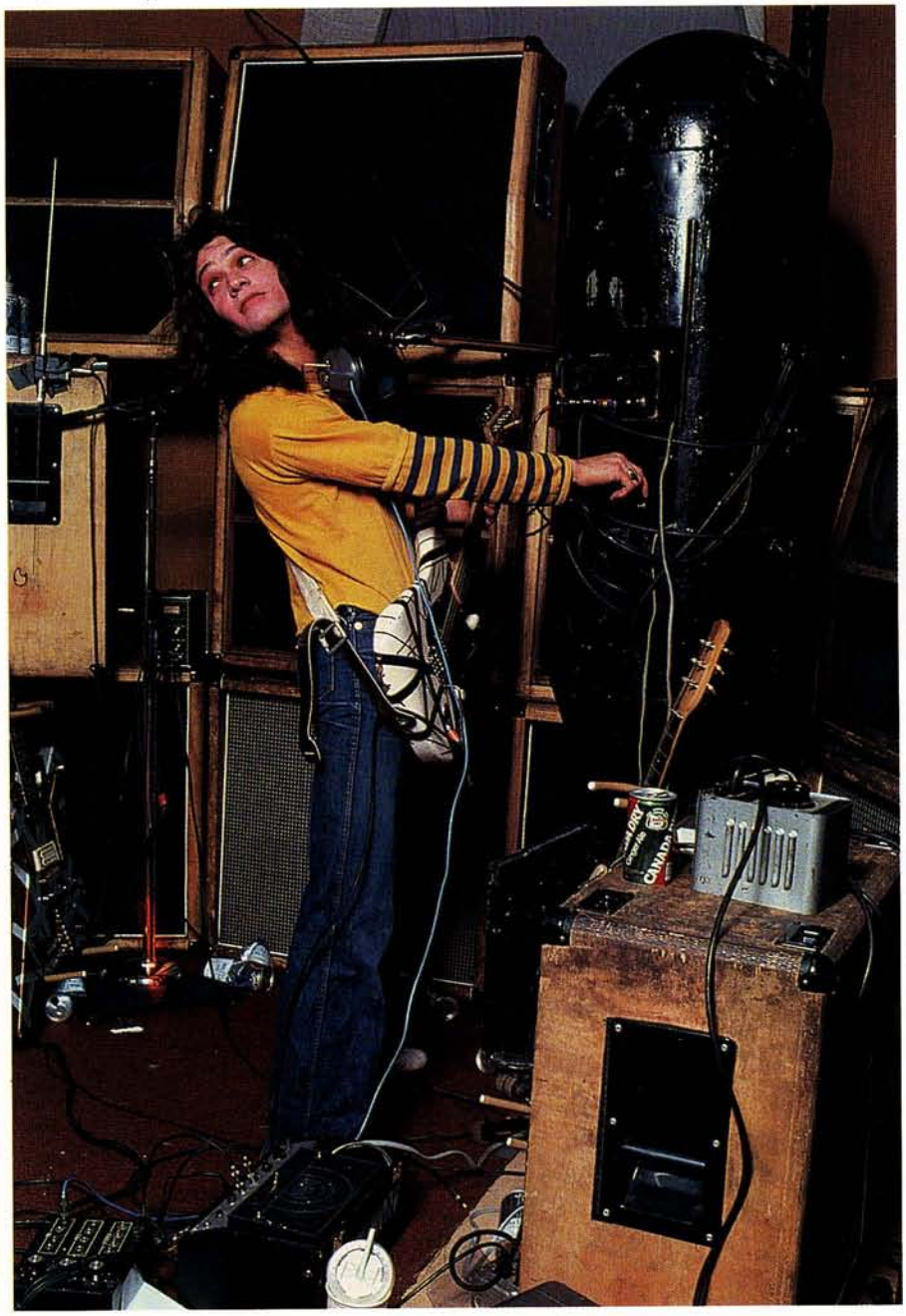
VAN HALEN Well, that's kind of what I'm saying, that I changed the way people played the guitar, you know? I mean, you see everybody doing it, and they weren't until I did it. So it's kind of obvious. It's not like I'm on an ego trip or anything.

GW What's your take on the L.A. band scene nowadays? How has it changed since you played the clubs?

VAN HALEN I think, in a funny way, that Van Halen kind of paved the way for that, too. When we were playing the clubs, there was no room for a bunch of long-haired, platformed, goofy-lookin' fools! [*laughs*] It was real hard for us to get into the clubs. It was always [*in gruff voice*], "You're too loud, your guitar's too psychedelic, etc." We used to get fired because you'd have to play five sets of Top 40 stuff, and we'd only have one set—which we'd play for the audition. We'd get the gig, play our one set of Top 40 songs, and then start playing our own stuff. Halfway through the second set the club owner would be screaming, "Hey! Get the hell outta here!" So we'd have to start playing our own gigs.

GW A lot of bands do that nowadays—the self-promotion thing.

VAN HALEN I'm not really too familiar with the club scene today. I don't even know where to go if I want to go to a club. I don't get out much.



NEIL ZLOZOWER

GW There's the pay-for-play thing happening.

VAN HALEN Like at [*Los Angeles club*] Gazarri's? I heard about that. You have to pay to play?

GW Bands have to pay something like $1500 to play.

VAN HALEN I'll tell you, making 75 bucks a night isn't much better! [*laughs*] It sure isn't enough to buy equipment. I mean, Alex and I used to go around and paint house numbers on curbs to make extra money.

GW Who are some of the players that have impressed you during the past decade?

VAN HALEN Well, there's Satriani and Vai. They're excellent players. [*pauses*] I don't really listen to anything! I'm always wrapped up doing my own stuff, always writing.

GW Any lesser-known players?

VAN HALEN Well, there's this band I'm producing called Private Life. And Danny Johnson, I love the way he plays. He's got that Louisiana blues sound, but he can also have the fire of Allan Holdsworth. He's got the vibe I really like.

GW One of the things you pioneered was two-handed tapping.

VAN HALEN I don't know if I was the first one to do it. I mean, I'm sure that somebody else thought of it, too! [*laughs*]

GW Nevertheless, people equate Van Halen with pyrotechnics. You brought it to the masses.

VAN HALEN Right. Funny thing is, I think I've mellowed out in my old age. I see a lot of people using it as a trick, but to me, it's just the way I play. It's not like, "Oh, oh, I'm gonna do a trick now!" I mean, you see these other guys playing and it's, "Watch this!" A trick. Like a vibrato bar—I don't use it as a trick, but as a way to play. I think I've gotten a little tastier through the years. I don't play as recklessly; I'm a little more melodic. I guess I'm much more into songs and songwriting.

GW Does it bother you that people have focused so much on the two-handed tapping technique? That maybe some other aspects of your playing have been overlooked?

VAN HALEN Yeah. I mean, whether I tap or not, I'm still a good player. If that's all I'm known for, then goddamn...

GW There are so many technicians around now, people who can really wail. But there are very few sonic innovators—people whose sound is instantly recognizable.

VAN HALEN I think that comes with time. When I first started playing, I was like—"brrrrrrrrr!"—as fast as I could go too. It was fun. But as you mature a little bit, you see there's no point to it, and you start using your technique to bring out your style.

GW When did you notice that you were progressing on the guitar a little faster than your peers? When did the term "guitar hero" begin to be tossed in your direction?

VAN HALEN Probably when our first album came out.

GW But before then, there must have been people who said you were a pretty hot player.

VAN HALEN Well, yeah, when other people tell you, sure. Okay!

GW You've always acknowledged the mistakes on Van Halen albums. What are some of the most amusing examples?

VAN HALEN All kinds of stuff! I don't think there's any one song of ours that's done right all the way through. [*laughs*] Sometimes I'm out of tune a little bit. I heard "Where Have All the Good Times Gone?" on the radio the other day, and I'm doing these harmonics...missed 'em. I kinda chuckled.

GW But most people would've removed their mistakes.

VAN HALEN Especially nowadays. Everything's so technically advanced. I'm not really a perfectionist, in that sense. I'm more for a vibe.

GW There was a pretty good goof in your cover of "Oh, Pretty Woman." You forgot part of the bridge.

VAN HALEN Yeah. I screwed up! [*laughs*] I never bought the record, I didn't know how the song went, so it was, "I think this is how it goes," you know? And so we did it, and realized later that it was wrong. I met Roy Orbison at Farm Aid. I don't even know if he knew we did it. You know, everybody was pushing for cover tunes on *Diver Down*, so I said, "Well, let's at least do 'Pretty Woman'—it's got a riff, unlike some of the other stuff we were doing.

GW Did you intend to go right from "Intruder" into "Oh, Pretty Woman"?

VAN HALEN Oh, that was an afterthought. We'd done the video for "Pretty Woman" and needed something else for it, so we went in the studio and just tagged that on. I was drinking a beer—that's me sliding the can on the strings—"A-rooo! A-rooo!"

GW Van Halen's sound on your first couple of records was very much that of a raw, live band. But this has changed somewhat. Now it's a fuller, more produced sound.

> "If I had to learn to read music, it would take forever."

VAN HALEN Yeah, well, the main thing in the beginning was that I had never been in the studio before. I remember asking Ted Templeman and Donn Landee, "Hey, do you mind if I just play like I do live?" Because I didn't have any rhythm parts underneath the solos. I didn't know how to overdub. That's why it sounds live—it is!

GW What noticeable changes have you made in the way you now lay down basic tracks?

VAN HALEN See, a lot of times I'll still do a live solo, but I'll just overdub the rhythm part underneath. I guess we're just getting better at recording. The technology has advanced so much since '77!

GW Do you think your guitar sound has changed any?

VAN HALEN Believe it or not, I'm using the exact same stuff I always have. I have an old baby Marshall. And Kramers, which I started playing around five or six years ago. I don't know, I just turn everything all the way up! I used to use those old MXR Phase 90s on all the solos—it's kind of a cool sound. I don't use that much now, though. I have a rack that looks like computer shit, but I don't even know what's on it. [*pauses*] The only thing I use is a little bit of delay and a couple of Harmonizers. It's not a real tight echo.

GW You've been successful for some years now. How do you fend off complacency, the whole "rock star" trip?

VAN HALEN See, all I do is make music. I don't go out. I just sit up here on the hill, in my studio. I've always been that way, so nothing's different. A lot of people want to be successful so they can go out and party and have fun. But to me, making music is the fun part. I'm a

NEIL ZLOZOWER

weirdo! [*laughs*] I mean, that's what you saw out there [*points in the direction of the studio*].

GW "Beat It" created such a buzz. How did your involvement with that song come about?

VAN HALEN Quincy Jones called me up to ask if I wanted to play on Michael Jackson's record.

GW Of course, at the time, Michael Jackson wasn't the pop icon that he is today.

VAN HALEN I didn't think he was. But when that record came out, it sure was a big one! It was really funny. I was out back, and something was wrong with the phone. And you know, there's always people calling me. So I said, "Hello?" And there was this guy answering, "Hello?" We couldn't hear each other, so I hung up. And then the call came again: "Is this Eddie? It's Quincy, man!" And I'm like, "Who the hell? What do you want, you asshole?" [*laughs*] So finally he says, "It's Quincy Jones, man!" And I'm thinking, Oh shit—I'm sorry, man. It was really funny. After the record, he wrote me a letter thanking me, signed, "The Asshole." [*laughs*]

GW Did you work the solo out before you cut it?

VAN HALEN No, I just noodled along. I actually changed part of the song, though, because they wanted me to solo over the break. So I said, "Can we edit it to a verse, so there's some chord changes?" Then I just soloed over what I thought should be the solo section. I did two solos, and they picked the one they liked. That was it. It took about 20 minutes to do. And there was Michael, standing in the back saying [*mimics Michael Jackson*] "I really like that high fast stuff you do!" [*laughs*]

GW It seemed logical to assume that as of result of "Beat It" you'd receive a lot of offers to play on other people's records. Yet we haven't seen you do much of that.

VAN HALEN Yeah, well, just recently Stevie Nicks...Steve Perg...everybody's calling. Thank God I have an answering machine! [*laughs*] Believe it or not, I did the Michael Jackson thing because I figured nobody'd know. I swear to God. The band—Roth, my brother and Mike—always hated me doing things outside of Van Halen. They'd say, "Keep it in the band." And it just so happened that Roth was on one of his Amazon jungle trips or whatever he does, and Al was out of town, and Mike was out at Disneyland or something, so I couldn't consult them. So I just said, "Damn it, I'll do it and no one will ever know." So then it comes out and becomes song of the year and everything. My brother still won't let me live it down. And I did it for free, too! [*laughs*]

GW What about Tone Loc sampling "Jamie's Cryin' "?

VAN HALEN [*Excitedly*] Oh, right! I'm sitting around watching MTV one day and I think, That sure sounds like my guitar and Al's drums...

GW Wait a second. The story I had from the label is that you were consulted.

VAN HALEN Hell, no! I was just sitting there, and I hear my brother's drums. And then there's my guitar! So I called up our manager and said, "What is this shit?" So I guess he called them up and said that they should at least thank us. [*laughs*] And I guess we're thanked on the record.

GW This is done all the time these days. A lot of rap uses hard rock and heavy metal guitar samples.

VAN HALEN I think it's a bullshit thing. I mean, why don't they just have someone else play it? It's kinda thin, you know?

GW Let me ask you about your hearing. Does Pete Townshend's problem cause you any concern?

VAN HALEN Well, I'll tell you one thing I don't do, and that's stack my cabinets. Even in the old days, when I used to have the mountainous shit, I only used the bottom cabinets. Just don't stand in front of the stuff. I like to stand in front of them so I can feel my arm hairs move—but not the hair on my head.

GW You mentioned Satriani and Vai earlier, but did anybody else who came up during the Eighties make you sweat—maybe just a little?

VAN HALEN No. See, nobody makes me sweat. If anything, when I hear somebody good, it inspires me, you know? Like when I first heard Holdsworth, that made me want to play! To me, music isn't a competitive thing. There are so many good players around—I'm not in competition with them. I'm not out to be better than anybody. Music is such a personal thing. How can you say someone's better than someone else?

GW Well, there is some lame stuff out there.

VAN HALEN [*laughs*] That's true!

GW You were pretty involved with Holdsworth's career for a while there.

VAN HALEN Yeah, I got him signed to Warner Bros. because I just hated to see this guy who's so amazing selling guitars to stay alive. So I got him signed. I was supposed to co-produce the record with Ted Templeman and Donn Landee. Then—I hate to say this—while we were on tour in South America he just didn't wanna wait like two weeks, you know? So he did it himself...and it ended up being just another Allan Holdsworth record. The guy needs direction, you know what I mean? We did a couple of demos before I went to South America, and one of the songs was great. So he blew it, I think. I really think I could have, well, not necessarily pulled him back, but steered him in a different direction, you know? I was just over my friend Steve

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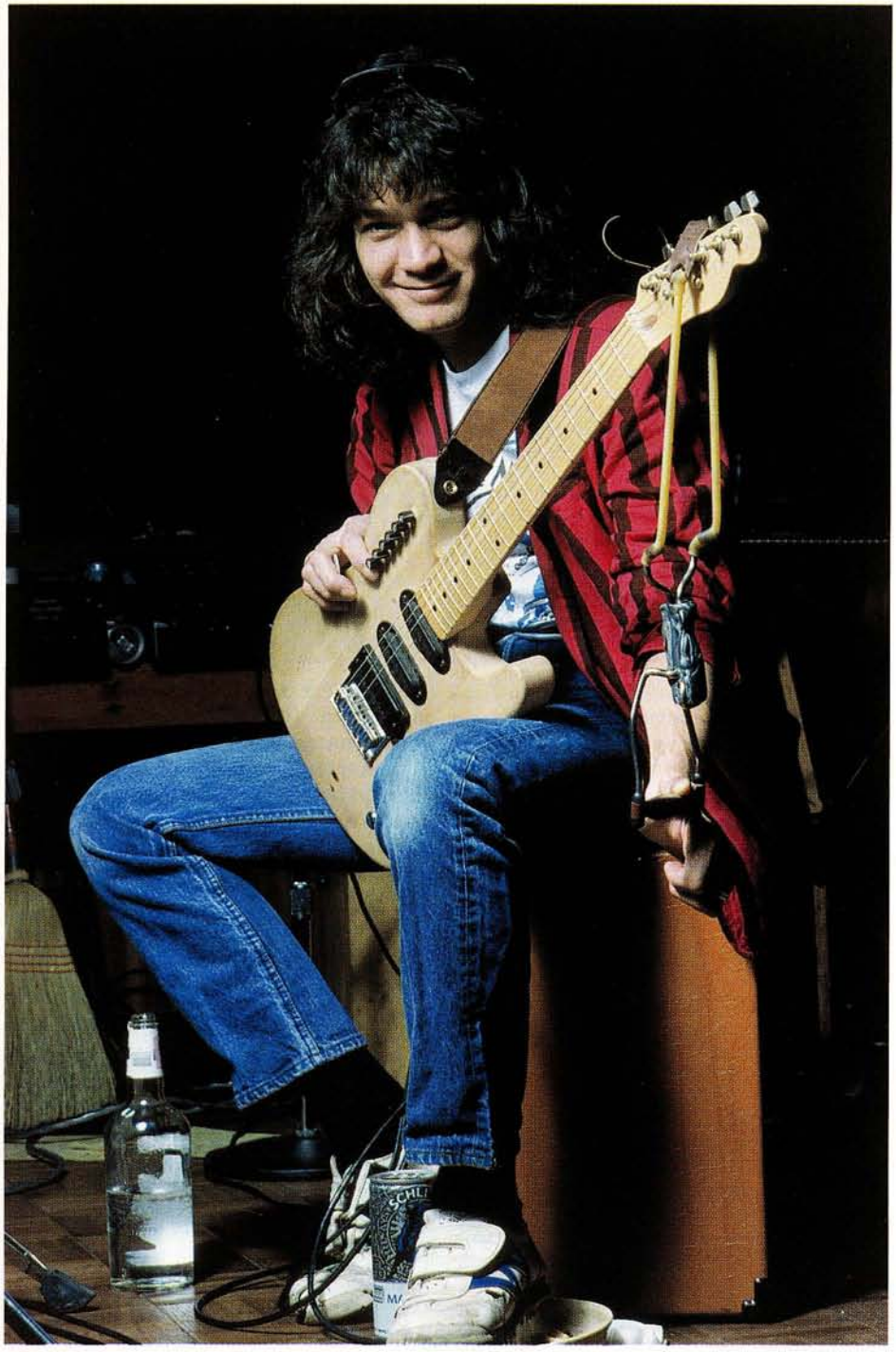
EDDIE VAN HALEN ON...

"POUNDCAKE"

(FOR UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE)

"Sometimes Al has a better ear for my playing than I do. I'll just play a hint of something, and he'll stop me and say, 'That part right there.' And more often than not, it will be something that will eventually evolve into a song. 'Poundcake' came from Al recognizing the potential of a chord progression."



Lukather's house, and he played me Allan's new record, and I tell you, I couldn't tell the difference between that and his other records. I don't wanna rag on the guy, because he's an incredible player and he's a good friend. I love him. He just needs direction, that's all.

GW Have you worked with him since that episode?

VAN HALEN Yeah, I talked to him on the phone about a month ago. He called and asked if I'd want to do something with him. And I'd love to, except I don't really have the time right now. When the time is right, sure. It'll be fun. I don't give a damn if it's good or not. Like that thing I did with Brian May [*Starfleet Project*]; that wasn't good, but it was fun.

I'd sure like to see how Holdsworth does some of his stuff, but I never had the nerve to ask him. It takes me two hands to do what he does with one. I don't know how he pulls it off! I mean, I have a hell of a reach, too, you know? I'd also love to pick Jimmy Page's brain about how he got some of those sounds. It'd be more in terms of sounds than, "How'd you play this?"

GW How do you feel about Page these days? He's been getting a bad rap.

VAN HALEN And that's bullshit. He's a genius. He's a great player, a songwriter and producer, so there you go. Put it this way: he might not be the greatest executor or whatever, but when you hear a Page solo, he speaks. I've always said that Clapton was my main influence, but Page was actually more the way I am, in a reckless abandon kind of way.

GW Do you still tinker around, building guitars, as you used to?

VAN HALEN Not as much as I used to. The only reason I did that was because I was trying to find—well, not necessarily the perfect guitar, but the guitar that served my means. I'll show you... [*Eddie exits, returning momentarily with his famous striped Strat with the Kramer neck.*] It does exactly what I want it to do. I used to build guitars because I wanted one that had a Gibson sound, but with a vibrato bar. I wanted a Strat with a Gibson sound, and that's what this is.

GW A lot of guitar manufacturers have taken cues from you over the years.

VAN HALEN Oh, God, tell me about it.

GW The non-pickguard. You were about the first to...

VAN HALEN The whole vibrato bar, one-pickup thing was my idea. It was actually a mistake, the way I came up with it. I bought a Strat, and took a chisel to it to carve out the rear pickup cavity, the one by the bridge, so I could drop a humbucker into it . But as I removed the pickguard and put the new pickup in, I didn't know how to rewire it—you know, I couldn't get the wires back in. So I thought, Wow, I wonder how it'll work just straight to the volume knob. So I left it like that. Then I made myself a plastic pickguard to cover up the holes, and that's how this concept was born. You know, when I used to play Les Pauls I could never get a good sound out of the front and rear pickups at the same time. If you get a nice fat sound out of the back one and then you put it on the front, it's real muddy. Either that or you have to set it so bright to get a good sound out of the front one that the back pickup sounds like shit. So I just said, "Damn, what do I need two pickups for?"

GW You don't strike me as a real EQ freak or anything.

VAN HALEN Oh, no. I just turn everything up! [*laughs*]

GW If you turn everything up with some Marshalls, there's either too much treble or too much bass.

VAN HALEN Yeah, that's why I use the old ones. Any time I see an old one, I buy it. Even if it sounds like shit, because they can be made to sound good.

GW Is the VARIAC still a part of your sound?

VAN HALEN Yep.

GW Does that actually change the voltage?

VAN HALEN Yeah, that's all it does.

GW And you plug the output of the amplifier into the VARIAC?

VAN HALEN Yeah. That's all. It's a light dimmer! I use a studio light dimmer. See, it enables you to play at a lower volume, but you can still get the balls of the amp. I blew out the house once, when we used to live in

NEIL ZLOZOWER

this little shack in Pasadena. We had this little light dimmer in the wall, and I thought, Wow, I wonder what'll happen if I hook my amp up to that? [*This is a dangerous procedure and should not, under any circumstances, be attempted.*]

GW Once the VARIAC is installed, you just lower the dimmer and run the amp up full—it acts like a master volume control, and does so without your having to lower the master volume control on the amp.

VAN HALEN And you get the whole output of the amp. Know what I mean? It sounds sweet.

GW What do you think of the guitar sounds we're hearing today? What do you think when you turn on the radio?

VAN HALEN I think everybody sounds the same. Playing-wise, too. Everybody has a Marshall stack now, and a guitar like this [*holds up his guitar*] or a Les Paul. Nobody's doing anything different. It all sounds like razor blades coming at your ears after a while. Just fuzzed-out noise.

GW What if you were a kid today, and there's already an Edward Van Halen out there. What would you do to avoid sounding like a carbon copy?

VAN HALEN I don't know...maybe pull out some old Cream records. Listen to old blues stuff and get your feel happening, instead of just jumpin' in and playing as fast as you can, copying the latest hit on the radio. I mean, I don't know what scales are—I just play what sounds right to me. I never had a lesson in my life. So, this scale or that scale, I don't know. To me, you have 12 notes to work with, and whatever configuration you use is up to you.

"If I wanna play keyboards or if I wanna play tuba, I'll play it."

GW But didn't you study music theory as a kid?

VAN HALEN I was supposed to. It takes too long to learn. I don't even like to read books! If I had to learn to read music, it would take forever.

GW So a certain amount of ignorance is bliss?

VAN HALEN I think the grass is green on both sides—as long as you don't get too caught up in that reading-the-chart syndrome.

GW What about someone like U2's the Edge, who doesn't have a whole lot of chops but still created an identifiable sound.

VAN HALEN He sure likes his echo, doesn't he? But see, there again, he's more of a songwriter, and that's where it's at. Expressing yourself in a song is a lot more wide open then. All these kids who are just gunslingers, they'll come around. You can't be doing that all your life—it's impossible.

GW Do you ever feel, in a very small way, responsible for the emphasis on speed-playing today?

VAN HALEN For kids playing like typewriters? Hey, that's not my fault! Maybe they cop the speed because they can't cop my feel. Maybe they shouldn't think so much. I don't think when I play. I get the basic parts of the song and then, when I start soloing, I don't think.

GW While we're on the subject of sound, "Finish What Ya Started" is kind of a departure for you. *(might as well jump to page 65)*

SAMMY DRILLS EDDIE

HAGAR PUTS ON HIS JOURNALISM CAP AND INTERVIEWS VAN HALEN ON SUBJECTS RANGING FROM GUITAR LICKS AND TRICKS TO THE "BROWN SOUND" AND SONGWRITING INSPIRATION.

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ROSS MARINO/RETNA (THIS SPREAD)

HOW TO GET an inside look at Eddie Van Halen? There are but three other people living the music with him from creation to recording to the stage. Who better to get the usually reticent Eddie to open up without being in "interview" mode? All it took was the invitation from Sammy Hagar to do the job for us. So, two nights after Van Halen's surprise return engagement at the Whisky in Hollywood to kick off the release of *Van Halen Live: Right Here, Right Now*, the two bandmates settled down for a one-on-one conversation in the lobby of the Bel Aire hotel.

SAMMY HAGAR How do you think your sound has changed over the years?

EDDIE VAN HALEN Just the sound? It's changed depending on what equipment I use.

HAGAR But it has changed.

VAN HALEN Oh yeah. A lot of that has to do with not just the sound—it's the way I play. I think there's a natural kind of growth and progression to it. I used the same amp and equipment for nine albums and they all sounded different.

HAGAR Because you are playing differently, obviously you are trying to get a different kind of sound out of your ax. What kind of sound do you hear in your head that you want to get?

VAN HALEN Something warm; the old brown sound. It's just a natural thing. I ain't trying to do nothing.

HAGAR Still looking for that old brown sound.

VAN HALEN Yeah, I want my guitar to sound like Al's snare.

HAGAR Have you gotten closer to that?

VAN HALEN I think so.

HAGAR So that front pickup is more brown. Now you use that front pickup more than you ever did.

VAN HALEN For solos, yeah.

HAGAR That's what I'm talking about more than rhythm. I think your sound has changed. I've noticed it on the new album, *For Unlawful Carnal Knowledge*. *5150* was pretty much the same sound but on the new album it changed.

VAN HALEN Yeah. I've got an extra pickup to play with. And I use it.

HAGAR You see, folks, now he *is* using his front pickup!

VAN HALEN The neck position.

HAGAR Do you play different if you pick up an acoustic guitar?

VAN HALEN Yeah.

HAGAR So sound means a lot to you and the way you play?

VAN HALEN Sound is a lot of Mr. Inspiration. If things sound a certain way you play a certain way. Playing acoustic guitar I play different than I do on electric guitar. Obviously you can't get the feedback and sustain that you can on an electric guitar. It all affects the whole ball of wax.

HAGAR Do you play with a soft touch or do you wrestle the guitar?

VAN HALEN I'm a very aggressive player, actually. When I see myself back playing on video it seems like I'm not doing anything but I'm fighting it the whole time.

HAGAR So what keeps you from getting cramps when you play that hard? The only way I keep from getting cramps is to lighten up, relax, and just feel smooth. I can play all over the place, I can play as fast as you for a couple of minutes.

VAN HALEN It's kind of like running a marathon. You're got to stretch and warm up. So in a funny way, the more you do it the less likely you are to get any cramps or pains. You pick up a guitar twice in the set and you're cold. So obviously it's kind of like running a marathon after not training. You've got to loosen up. And the more you play, the looser it gets. Once you get warmed up you can go forever.

"YOU ARE ALWAYS EASILY INTIMIDATED AND YOU SHOULDN'T BE." —HAGAR

HAGAR How long do you have to warm up before a show so you can play two and a half hours of all this crazy shit without getting cramps or without your shit blocking up on you?

VAN HALEN A good 15 minutes.

HAGAR That's all? Do you warm up with all your might?

VAN HALEN Yeah. I play the same as I do on record or live.

HAGAR When you run a marathon you warm up easy and slow and then build up. If you're doing a boxing match you shadow box and take it easy.

VAN HALEN No, I don't. I pick up the guitar and play and there's no set thing that I do.

EDDIE VAN HALEN on...

"RIGHT NOW
(FOR UNLAWFUL CARNAL KNOWLEDGE)

"I wrote it a long time before we recorded it—right around the 'Jump' period. Some people thought it was really risky, but to me, it's not even stepping out. It's still a rock tune; it's just piano-based. It's still Van Halen."

HAGAR You use pretty much your whole repertoire of tricks?

VAN HALEN Not necessarily, no. I just play a little bit and loosen up the fingers.

HAGAR Are you aware of every note you play when you take a solo?

VAN HALEN No. I'm really not thinking but at the same time my hand stretches from the D to the A [*on an E string*], about eight frets. And wherever I move around on the neck I have that spread and I know what I can do with that spread, so to speak.

HAGAR So more than positions on your guitar you're doing it with positions with your hand.

VAN HALEN Yeah. You've only got 12 notes and however you mix them up is your thing.

HAGAR Old strings? New strings? Every time I walk into the studio and pick up one of your guitars, it's got old, fucked-up strings.

VAN HALEN Because I like that warm sound. Basically what I do when we're recording is if I snap a string I'll change one, but I never really re-string. But live I do.

HAGAR Why do you think that is? Do you play harder live? Because in the studio we play a lot longer than two and a half hours without changing a guitar string. Sometimes we play six or seven hours.

VAN HALEN I think I wrestle a little more live. You get excited and kind of jacked up.

HAGAR Are you bored with playing guitar?

VAN HALEN Not at all.

HAGAR Never? You don't ever pick up the guitar and go, "Man, I'm bored with this shit"?

VAN HALEN Believe it or not, when I'm jamming with you and Mike and Al, that's fun.

HAGAR That's good. I'm glad to hear that. Speaking of me, whenever we play back and forth do I ever kick you in the ass?

VAN HALEN You inspire me.

HAGAR To play better?

VAN HALEN Yeah.

HAGAR You should play with better guitar players more often. It would be good for you.

VAN HALEN Oh, you mean when you play?

HAGAR When I'm playing guitar.

VAN HALEN Oh, oh.

HAGAR I pick up a guitar onstage and I start blowing and I pull off some hot licks.

VAN HALEN No, no. I'm not taking back what I said—just as a person you inspire me—but when you play guitar, believe it or not I try to complement. You play guitar on your songs and I try to complement your playing as opposed to trying harder to play better.

HAGAR I dig what you're saying but I'm talking about occasionally onstage, right before we play "One Way to Rock," I'll put my guitar on and because I haven't played all night I'll start checking my sound. I'll start blowing and blow some hot shit and all of a sudden your ear might turn around to make you want to play better. It's not

NEIL ZLOZOWER (SIDEBAR)

because I'm trying to flatter myself; I'm just trying to get to you in front of all the people who are going to read this and say you should probably play with more guitar players who kick you in the ass once in a while. You are always easily intimidated and you shouldn't be. You can rise to the occasion. Probably makes you play better. I might be wrong.

VAN HALEN When I did that Toto benefit for [*drummer*] Jeff Porcaro a lot of people said, "Wow, man."

HAGAR You really played good.

VAN HALEN Because Luke [*Steve Lukather*] is a great player. I'm not taking anything away from you.

HAGAR Luke is a better player than me, my god!

VAN HALEN Well, no.

HAGAR Look, neither one of you guys can sing as good as me, alright?

VAN HALEN You got that right. But a lot of people said, "Wow, man, you really blew some different stuff." I don't know. It's very subconscious. I don't think about it. It's not like I consciously go, "There's another guitar player, now I'd better play good."

HAGAR You wouldn't consciously do that. It's like when you say you're not conscious of every note you're playing but in a way you kind of are.

VAN HALEN It's kind of like feeding off of you.

HAGAR How much do you think piano affected your being able to play guitar the way you do, especially the hammer-on side of it? Do you think the two-handed thing comes from piano at all?

VAN HALEN 110 percent. I love playing piano. Acoustic piano is probably my favorite instrument.

HAGAR I hear it when you write songs. "Love Walks In," "When It's Love" and "Dreams" were all presented on piano.

VAN HALEN I'm not technically as good on piano as I am on guitar. If I have an idea in my head I can execute it. I'm not into soloing on the piano. I don't know how to do that.

HAGAR Where do you think songwriting ideas come from? I know when we talk about them you and I sit down and go, "Let's write a tune that goes to this groove." What about the songs where all of a sudden you come to me and go, "I've got this idea"? Where the hell does it come from? Where's inspiration come from?

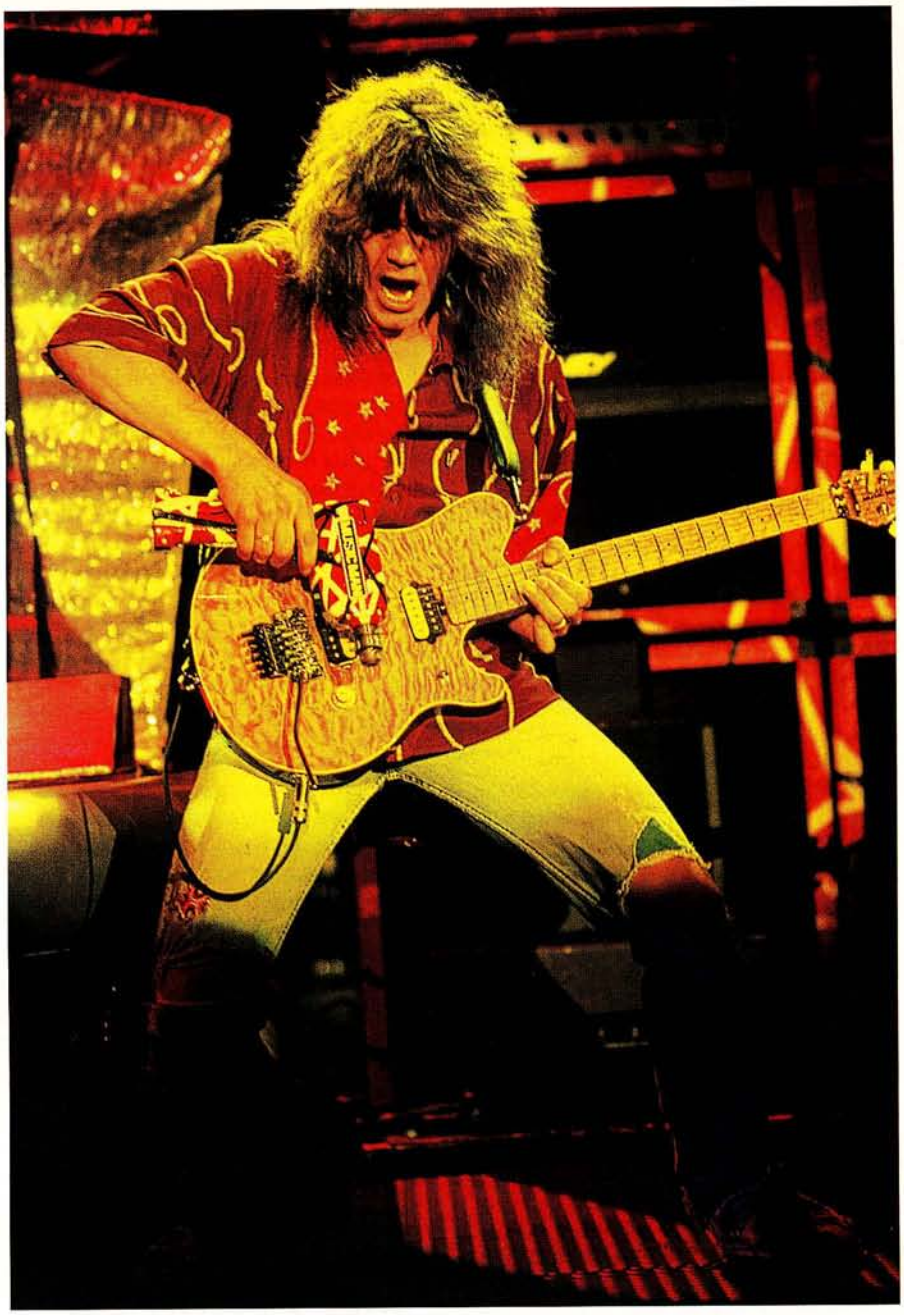
VAN HALEN A way, way higher level than anything I can explain. Because I can't personally claim to have come up with anything.

HAGAR You've come up with a lot, so it comes from somewhere.

VAN HALEN Where it comes from I don't know. I mean, when Al starts a drum groove I kick in with something. But where that comes from I don't know.

HAGAR But Al doesn't always start a drum groove. I've heard stuff with the telephone pushed against the guitar in the middle of the night. Where does inspiration come from? How come it comes to your door?

RICK GOULD



VAN HALEN I don't know why it comes knocking on my door but when I get excited about life in general I get inspired. When I was taking a shower this morning I was thinking about when we went to New York to do MTV in 1986, and I called you up at four in the morning. You were in the band and we were cooking. We were happening and I was excited.

HAGAR You played the music to "5150" over the phone. I came running down. It pulled me right up out of bed.

VAN HALEN But the actual notes and music, I don't know where they come from. Really, I feel like I'm just a vehicle.

HAGAR It's just emotions. It's a high or low. You get really bummed out, you write something low.

VAN HALEN Sometimes if I'm bummed out I'll write something happy to cheer myself up.

HAGAR Do you now think it's more important to pick up a guitar and write a song rather than practice? Do you still try to progress as a guitarist or do you try to use it to write songs?

VAN HALEN When I first started out, to me the most important thing was how fast you could play and what a technician you could be. It's all changed. My priorities have changed to the point where to me a solo is like a song within a song but the bottom line is you have to have a good song first.

HAGAR You've got to write the song first.

VAN HALEN Yeah, you've got to have a good song to put the "other" song into. If you've got a bullshit song I don't give a fuck how good your solo is, it ain't going to make the song. It's like building a house; you need a good foundation, good structure before you can decorate the bathroom. I think I'm much more conscious of the overall end result as opposed to just being me.

ATOMIC PUNK *(cont. from page 17)*

of those sessions will likely never see release.

By May 2000, rumors were flying that Eddie, a longtime smoker, was battling tongue cancer. Close to a year later, Van Halen confirmed the rumors on the band's web site. "I'm sorry for having waited so long to address this issue personally, but cancer can be a very unique and private matter to deal with. I was examined by three oncologists and three head and neck surgeons at Cedars Sinai just before spring break and I was told that I'm healthier than ever and beating cancer. Although it's hard to say when, there's a good chance I will be cancer-free in the near future. I just want to thank all of you for your concern and support. Love, Eddie." By May 2002, Ed reported that he'd "gotten a 100 percent clean bill of health—from head to toe"—but his 21-year marriage to Valerie Bertinelli was not so lucky, ultimately ending in July 2002. To make matters worse, Warner Bros. very quietly had dropped the band from its artist roster some months earlier. After more than 70 million albums sold worldwide, one of the all-time great rock and roll bands found itself homeless.

Then, impossibly, David Lee Roth and Sammy Hagar joined forces for a tour together in the summer of 2002. Humbly titled Song for Song: The Heavyweight Champs of Rock and Roll Tour (but nicknamed the "Sans Halen" tour by fans), Sam and Dave played dates through September, with Dave dipping into the classic VH catalog more often than Sammy. "I'm not sure what the [Van Halen] brothers think, and I'm not sure I even really care," said Roth during the press blitz. "I think probably the two biggest words up there on Howdy Doody mountain now are 'Uh-oh.'" Dave's subsequent filing and dropping of a lawsuit against his former bandmates later in the year only seemed to dash hopes of an eventual reunion.

Sammy, however, sent mixed messages over the course of the summer, saying "Quite honestly, I'm not interested" to the Wisconsin *Journal Sentinel* in June but "I think a reunion is inevitable" at the MTV Video Music Awards three months later. Sure enough, by the fall of 2003, reunion rumors once again circulated, this time with Sammy at the lead, but the Van Halen camp kept silent, until finally announcing tour dates and a new band photo in March 2004. The tour was in support of a *Best of Volume 2*, spearheaded by the appropriately titled Sammy-sung single, "It's About Time."

World tours, roster changes, life-threatening illnesses, David Lee Roth—Van Halen, it seems, can survive anything. Having passed the 25-year mark, the band is less a mere musical group and more a simple force of nature: unpredictable, indestructible and undeniably powerful. At age 47, Eddie remains what he has always been: a master guitarist, supremely confident of his craft and his multiple role as songwriter, producer and musician. "I still have so much music in me," says Eddie. "So much that needs to come out."

ON THE ROAD *(cont. from page 41)*

that was bounced around was doing a record with me writing all the music and getting different singers—Joe Cocker, Phil Collins, Mike Rutherford—a different vocalist on each track. But Alex talked me out of it. He said that would be just a one-shot project, and it made me realize, Yeah, I want a family, I want a solid thing.

The thing is, I never thought Dave would quit—I thought he'd wake up. The things that he said were so weird. He asked how long the album was going to take, his attitude was [*mimics sarcastic tones*], "Hey, man, I've got better things to do, how long is it going to take?" I told him to count on about a year from starting point to album release—writing for a couple of months, recording for three months, and then all the red tape crap of mastering, album covers, T-shirts and all that. And he put it in the press like I just wanted to rot in the studio for a year. We recorded this album in three and a half months—we started in November and by March were on tour for nine months. And he told the press that these so-called "married men" with their Lamborghinis didn't want to tour, but only wanted to do some summer shows. He was the one who suggested not doing a record and just cashing in on the summer circuit. And I said, "What? I don't want to go on tour without any record." He said, "Hey, man, it don't matter." I said we had to do a new record.

The thing is, he's more into money than I am. I'm into making music; I'm a musician. And I love people liking what I'm doing. He's the businessman, not me.

GW How has Donn responded to the new face?

VAN HALEN Actually, it was Donn who said, "This is it." Seriously, that one Monday night we jammed, we played for 20 minutes and Donn flicked the talk-back button and said, "I never heard you guys sound that good."

GW Even Michael and Alex's sound has improved.

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah, it's a new fire. I'm not saying we couldn't have done a good record with Dave, but I think he started believing the attitude he started copping, the "Hey, I'm God" syndrome. To the point where his hat wouldn't fit his head anymore. I was still willing to put up with it.

GW I'm curious: how did Valerie respond to all this?

VAN HALEN She was pissed off, too, because she knew I wanted to quit years ago when we were doing *Fair Warning*. He used to pull shit on her, telling me, "Tell your old lady not to say this and that in the press about you." Bullshit stuff. I said, "Hey, I'm normal, and whatever you are, you are. Don't tell my wife not to say the way I am." I could write a book about the stuff that went down, and none of it had anything to do with music. The guy just did not treat anybody like a human. He was like Idi Amin or Muammar Qaddafi.

FEELS SO GOOD *(cont. from page 51)*

the bass. I met him at A&M when I was producing Sammy's record and playing bass. He was next door doing Pink Floyd. He also played on the Robbie Robertson album. I asked him about the lick he does on "Big Time." He said I was the only one who ever asked him how he did that. He said the bass was tapped with drum sticks. That must be a difficult thing to coordinate.

GPM What's your history with guitar? I first thought of you as a Les Paul man.

VAN HALEN That's all I used to play because of the sound. As soon as I discovered the tremolo bar I changed. I bought the Paul and the 335 because of Clapton. The 335 had a real wimpy bar on it. I bought the Strat just to get the tremolo bar. I kept experimenting, which I still kind of do at home. I don't do it as much because I like the way my guitar sounds now. Then I was fooling around because I wasn't happy with it. I changed pickups. On the first record I used a body that I bought at Boogie Brothers from Linn Ellsworth, who at the time owned Charvel. It was the black guitar with the white stripes. That's the same guitar I actually used up until *Diver Down*. It's on *1984* I think. I put it away because it's too special of a guitar. When I hooked up with Kramer I said, "Duplicate it."

GPM Is your Kramer any different than what I would buy at a store?

VAN HALEN The only difference between this and a store-bought one is that I built it. It's a Kramer neck and body. The Floyd Rose is the same. The pickup came from them. I'm not that picky about that. The sound comes basically from the wood and how you play it. It's more in your fingers. Other people have played my stuff and it doesn't sound the same when they play through it. I remember once we were opening for Ted Nugent at the Capitol Center in Maryland. Ted goes to Rudy, my roadie, "Let me plug into Ed's stuff." He thought I had some magic box. Rudy said, "Go ahead, it ain't going to sound the same." It's more the player. Take Holdsworth. It's the way he plays. It ain't the amp.

GPM What is your amp setup?

VAN HALEN Believe it or not, now I only use one amp. I'm back to using what I used to use in the clubs. I use one Marshall head into these H&H power amps. I use five cabinets behind me but they all sound identical. I take the speaker output and the whole amp out to power amps. But I still only use one amp that I like the sound of. It's kind of interesting that it's back to the way it used to be. I remember opening for Black Sabbath and Tony Iommi, who is a great guy, great player, would have eight Laney amp heads through one cabinet each. It was so overwhelmingly loud. It was great. I thought that's the way you're supposed to do it. So I did the same thing. I had six Marshall heads and packed them all in together and put each head through a separate cabi-

net. It was so loud I'd be totally numb by the end of the show, which back then was 40 minutes. I never understood how they did it. No wonder Ozzy never went in front of him. No wonder Dave stayed away from me, too, when I was playing that loud. It was pretty silly. We used to play so loud that we would actually be louder than the P.A. My guitar would barely ever come through the P.A, because I would be so loud off the stage. The sound guys would be uptight saying, "Nobody does this." Bull. Everybody does it, or so I thought. The sound guy had no control whatsoever. I'm now in the process of building an amp with Jose Arredondo.

GPM What do you want that you're not finding now?

VAN HALEN Obviously sound, and the ability to play at any volume and get good sound. I don't know anything about modern amps. All I use are old pre Mark II Marshalls, the old EL 34 tubes. I got a little Crate amp backstage that somebody laid on me because my Fender blew up. I don't know what amps are out there. Keyboard-wise I'm in MIDI hell. I have so much keyboard equipment now it's ridiculous. It's like my whole studio was full of digital this and that. I can understand the MIDI stuff for keyboards, it's great. Instead of having to play them all you just play one to trigger everything else. Miking a guitar, I just use a Shure SM 57 or 58—that's it. I have a Bradshaw rig but I don't really use it. We just bought a brand new state of the art Studer machine. It's a badass machine but it's not digital, it's analog. I like the sound of it better.

GPM The key to your success for continuing to grow as a musician is that you seem to have managed to maintain your innocence while exploring new technology.

VAN HALEN Oh man, thank God for Steve Porcaro. He really got off on the fact that I didn't know what I was doing with the keyboards. Some of the sounds I was getting, he said, how did you get that? The way I hook things up he wouldn't understand how I got it to sound so cool. He's going, don't change anything. It might be wrong, but leave it. Use it like that, it sounds good. He got off on that. Sometimes ignorance is a positive thing. Just like when I didn't know how to rewire my Strat, it paid off. It actually worked for me in a good way.

GPM Did the death of your father affect you musically?

VAN HALEN For a while it made it very hard for me to even think about making music. I didn't. I produced Sammy's record, then I went into the studio with Donn and produced [*guitarist*]Danny Johnson's band, Private Life, for Warner Bros. I was busy pretty much a whole year and I had not written or played guitar for me or for Van Halen at all until I wrote for this album. It almost felt like part of me went with him. I had an empty feeling, because a lot of my drive was for him, to make him proud. It was his name. He was proud.

MONSTER OF ROCK *(cont. from page 59)*

VAN HALEN It's a direct Strat. It was just for fun. We actually set out and tried to do something different, something goofy, and it worked.

GW Is it too early to talk about what you might do on the next Van Halen record?

VAN HALEN Oooh. [*pauses*] Anything and everything. Sammy and I are already writing, and we're comin' up with some really neat shit.

GW Is there any format you follow when you write together?

VAN HALEN Uh, I come up with music, he calls me and comes up with a concept, an idea—God, I don't wanna give anything away here—and he'll inspire me to write something. And then when I do, I'll inspire him, in turn, to write the lyrics to it. And then we sit down together and work it out. Then Al and Mike jump in and say, "We don't like that!" [*laughs*] No, I'm kidding. We never really write in the studio. The studio's just where we go to record. I just sit around with my guitar and a little cassette machine.

We've never had the luxury to do what we're doing right now, and that is stockpiling a bunch of tunes and then when we're ready to put it out, putting it out. Because with *5150*, you know, everybody was wondering what was going on with Van Halen, so we released it. And with *OU812*, we were already committed to do the Monsters of Rock tour [*with Scorpions, Metallica, Dokken and Kingdom Come*] before the record was even done. We would have preferred to finish the record, put it out, waited a bit, made sure we liked the record, and then booked a tour. That's what we're going to do this time.

GW How do you feel today about the Monsters of Rock tour?

VAN HALEN A lot of people slammed us for it, but we sold a lot of tickets. Not all of them were sold out, but hey, they were stadiums. That same year, Aerosmith and Guns N' Roses did the same thing, and they only sold like 30,000 seats outdoors. I didn't hear anybody raggin' about that.

GW You received so much flack about playing keyboards. Do you think people still don't see you as a keyboard player?

VAN HALEN I love playing keyboards, man. I write a lot of stuff on keys. It's like they don't want to realize that I play keyboards. See, here's the thing: when Dave was in the band, he would say, "Hey, man, nobody wants to see you play keyboards!" And I felt like, If I wanna play keyboards or if I wanna play tuba, I'll play it.

GW Are you as much a tinkerer with keyboards as you are with the guitar?

VAN HALEN Nah. I just like fooling around with sounds. I love the old OB-8s because they're hands-on, you know? You can just turn a knob and change the sound. You don't have to be a computer whiz. Nice, thick sound too; I think they sound better than the digital stuff.

GW People associate you so much with note-heavy solos, but your solo in "Dreams" is surprising: for roughly half the solo you play only two notes.

VAN HALEN Yeah. It just felt right. When I'm behind the console, overdubbing, I just say, "Hmmm, let's try this." If that doesn't work, I'll try something else. Sometimes I get a solo right off, and other times I'll be doing it all afternoon and...nothing.

GW Do you have much of a problem with writer's block?

VAN HALEN Sure, don't you? Sometimes things just don't come. So I just walk away from it. Actually, sometimes, I'll try and work through it. I'll get pissed off and think, I gotta beat this thing! But other times it doesn't work. There are no rules. Sometimes it can happen for you, sometimes not. Put it this way—if you're up for 24 hours and getting nowhere, it's time to call it quits.

GW Van Halen has, of late, enjoyed a good relationship with the rock press. But up until *1984*, it seemed like you guys couldn't do anything to get a good review.

VAN HALEN I think they just realized that we're here to stay, you know? It's like a roach that won't go away. Finally it's, "Okay, stay!" It used to bother me, because some of these guys didn't know what they were talking about. If you don't like what someone does, then say you don't like it—but don't say it stinks. I mean, who are they to say something isn't good? At least say that you just don't like it as a personal preference, an opinion.

GW One thing rarely pointed out is the band's ability to sing some wonderful background vocals. Does that bug you?

VAN HALEN That's a unique part of the Van Halen sound. That's Michael and me. I don't really care if people comment or not. That's just the way we are, that's part of the sound.

GW A lot of bands just can't sing.

VAN HALEN It's true ! The thing is, I'm not a singer, but I can hit a note. I have good pitch. Endurance is tough. Two beers, three songs, and I'm out.

GW Do you think Michael Anthony has gotten a short-shrift from the press?

VAN HALEN Sure. Because he's not a showboat kind of guy. Part of the reason I stick out so much is that Mike doesn't steal the show. I mean, if he wanted to hog the show, so to speak, we'd be butting heads. And if we tried to do unison things, what would be the point? I like the guys on the three instruments to be playing their own thing; I don't want everybody doing things together. The counterpoint thing, that's what I like. Just like the old Cream jams: they were all in their own worlds, but it worked.

GW Let's look ahead 10 years. Do you see yourself doing the same thing, with the same band?

VAN HALEN Oh, yeah. Definitely. I'm totally into family, so to speak. There's no reason why I can't be doing the same thing. I just want to make music and have fun. As long as you have the fire and you still want to do it, fine. When it starts getting old to me, then I'll start doing something else. I don't know what—maybe a race car driver!

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The Tones Behind The Tunes!

A Guide to the Perfect Tone

Listening to anything from Van Halen's debut album still amazes me. In this day and age of highly polished, double and triple tracked guitar recordings, there are few guitarists who have the talent to pull off the one-take performances the way Eddie could. And his 'brown sound' is one of the classic tones that spawned a thousand wannabes, and even to this day can still hold its own. I hope you will enjoy playing Eddie's tones as much as I have in bringing them to you.

I just got my hands on the new GNX4 today and I couldn't be more stoked. Not only do you have all the great modeling and effects available for getting this month's tones (which you can get at www.digitech.com/guitarworld), but you have a wealth of options for practicing and song creation.

One of the coolest features is the MP3 player, which lets me download all the great lesson clips from the magazine at: **>>HEAR IT ONLINE: WWW.GUITARWORLD.COM** Load these or your favorite artist MP3s on the compact flash card and you have your own portable tutor to practice with. Feeling inspired? The onboard recorder and General MIDI Drum machine with over 100 patterns and 8 kits will keep those creative juices flowing long into the night.

I hope these tones, playing hints, lessons, and ideas provided here inspire you to take your playing to the next level.

See you on stage.

Tone Guru Billy Clements is a 20-year veteran of the stage and studio and is a prolific creator of tones heard in countless recordings and performances around the world.

"Eruption"

Display Name: ERUPTION

Chan One EQ	On	0.0	150	2025	5200	0
GeNetX	Chan1	Britstak	Botq4x12	1	Britstak	Botq4x12
Chan Two EQ	On	0.0	150	550	3200	0
Tone	Ch1/Ch2	99/99	1/1	3/3	7/7	70/70
	On/Off	Param1	Param2	Param3	Param4	Param5
Wah - Pickup	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Compression	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Whammy/ IPS/Talk	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Stompbox	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Noise Gate	On	Silencer	15	0	–	–
Chorus/Mod	Off	Flanger	3	11	45	35
Delay	On	Spread	370	34	20	20
Reverb	On	Hall	5	99	40	59
Exp Assign	Exp1	Vol Pre	0	99	–	–

"Hot For Teacher"

Display Name: TEACHER

Chan One EQ	On	0.0	150	2450	5200	2
GeNetX	Chan1	Britstak	Brit4x12	1	Cleantub	Brit2x12
Chan Two EQ	On	0.0	150	5000	5000	0
Tone	Ch1/Ch2	80/55	-3/-8	5/1	7/9	85/92
	On/Off	Param1	Param2	Param3	Param4	Param5
Wah - Pickup	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Compression	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Whammy/ IPS/Talk	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Stompbox	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Noise Gate	On	Silencer	15	0	–	–
Chorus/Mod	On	Chorus	10	70	11	22
Delay	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Reverb	On	Hall	5	50	40	20
Exp Assign	Exp1	Vol Pre	0	99	–	–

"Finish What Ya Started"

Display Name: FINISH

Chan One EQ	On	0.0	150	2500	5000	0
GeNetX	Chan2	Acoustic	Direct	99	Blackfac	Direct
Chan Two EQ	On	0.0	150	1000	3200	0
Tone	Ch1/Ch2	99/60	4/0	2/8	8/0	99/85
	On/Off	Param1	Param2	Param3	Param4	Param5
Wah - Pickup	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Compression	On	Fast	10:1	20	6	–
Whammy/ IPS/Talk	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Stompbox	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Noise Gate	On	Silencer	15	0	–	–
Chorus/Mod	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Delay	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Reverb	On	Hall	0	50	33	24
Exp Assign	Exp1	Vol Post	0	99	–	–

"Ice Cream Man"

Display Name: ICECREAM

Chan One EQ	On	0.0	150	1200	6500	0
GeNetX	Chan1	Acoustic	Direct	1	Britstack	Botq4x12
Chan Two EQ	On	0.0	150	2025	5200	0
Tone	Ch1/Ch2	99/99	0/1	8/3	6/7	99/70
	On/Off	Param1	Param2	Param3	Param4	Param5
Wah - Pickup	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Compression	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Whammy/ IPS/Talk	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Stompbox	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Noise Gate	On	Silencer	15	0	–	–
Chorus/Mod	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Delay	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Reverb	On	Hall	5	99	40	25
Exp Assign	Exp1	Vol Pre	0	99	–	–

"Panama"

Display Name: PANAMA

Chan One EQ	On	0.0	150	2100	5150	0
GeNetX	Chan2	Britstak	Brit4x12	1	Britstak	Brit4x12
Chan Two EQ	On	0.0	150	2100	5150	0
Tone	Ch1/Ch2	81/81	-6/-7	7/7	7/0	65/65
	On/Off	Param1	Param2	Param3	Param4	Param5
Wah - Pickup	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Compression	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Whammy/ IPS/Talk	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Stompbox	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Noise Gate	On	Silencer	15	0	–	–
Chorus/Mod	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Delay	On	Spread	380	15	Off	23
Reverb	Off	–	–	–	–	–
Exp Assign	Exp1	Vol Post	0	99	–	–

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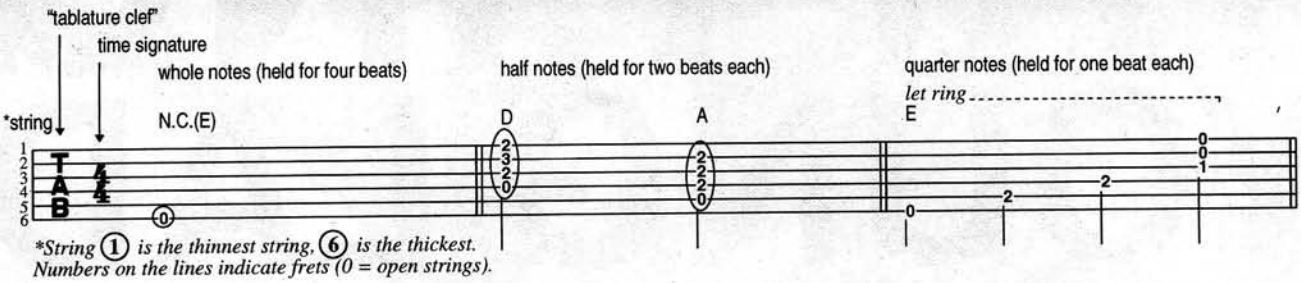
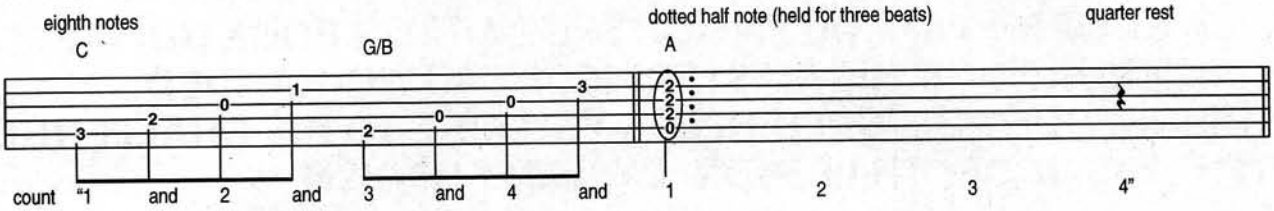
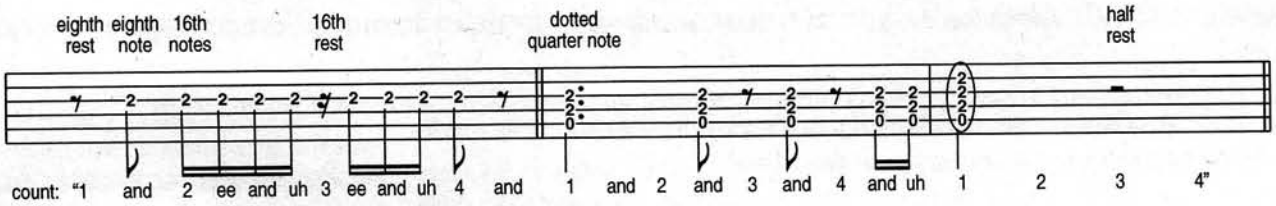
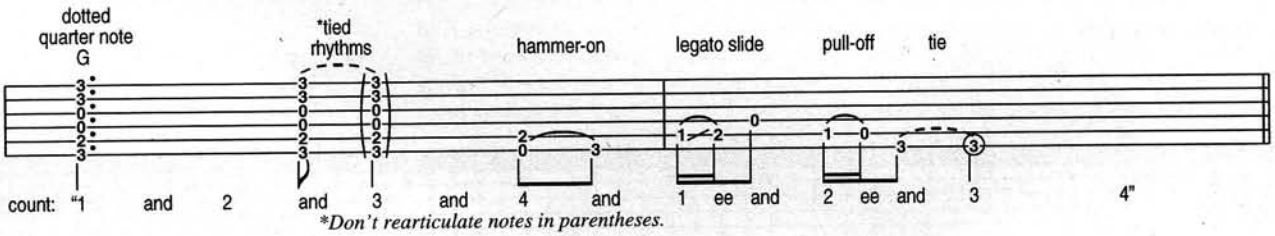
NOTATION GUIDE



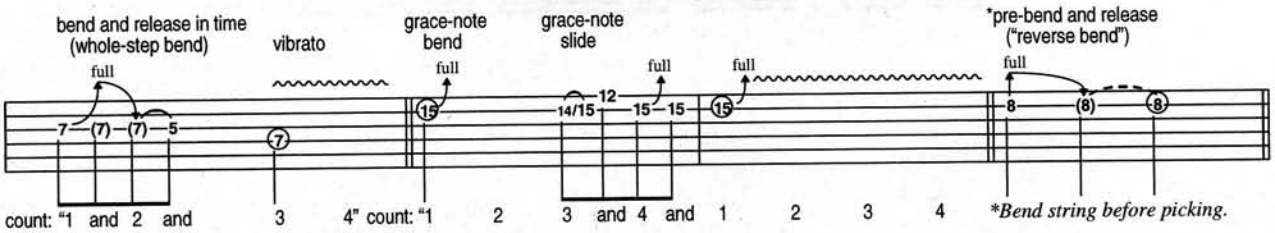
*String (1) is the thinnest string, (6) is the thickest.
Numbers on the lines indicate frets (0 = open strings).



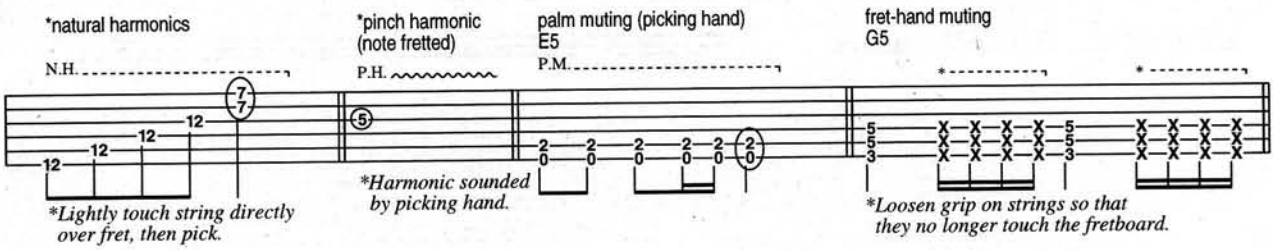




*Don't rearticulate notes in parentheses.

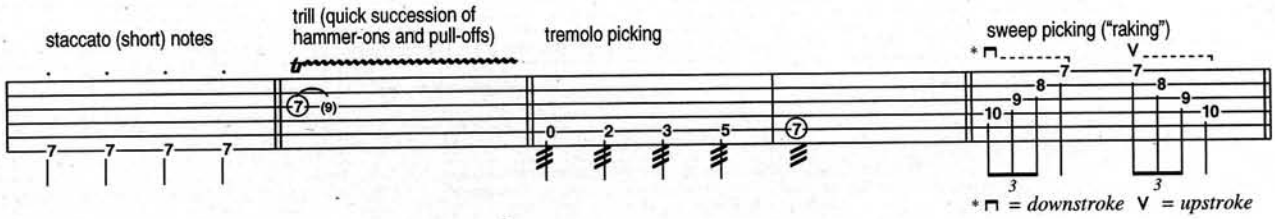


*Bend string before picking.



*Lightly touch string directly over fret, then pick.

*Harmonic sounded by picking hand.

*Loosen grip on strings so that they no longer touch the fretboard.

* ⊓ = downstroke V = upstroke

TAPPING YOUNG LAD

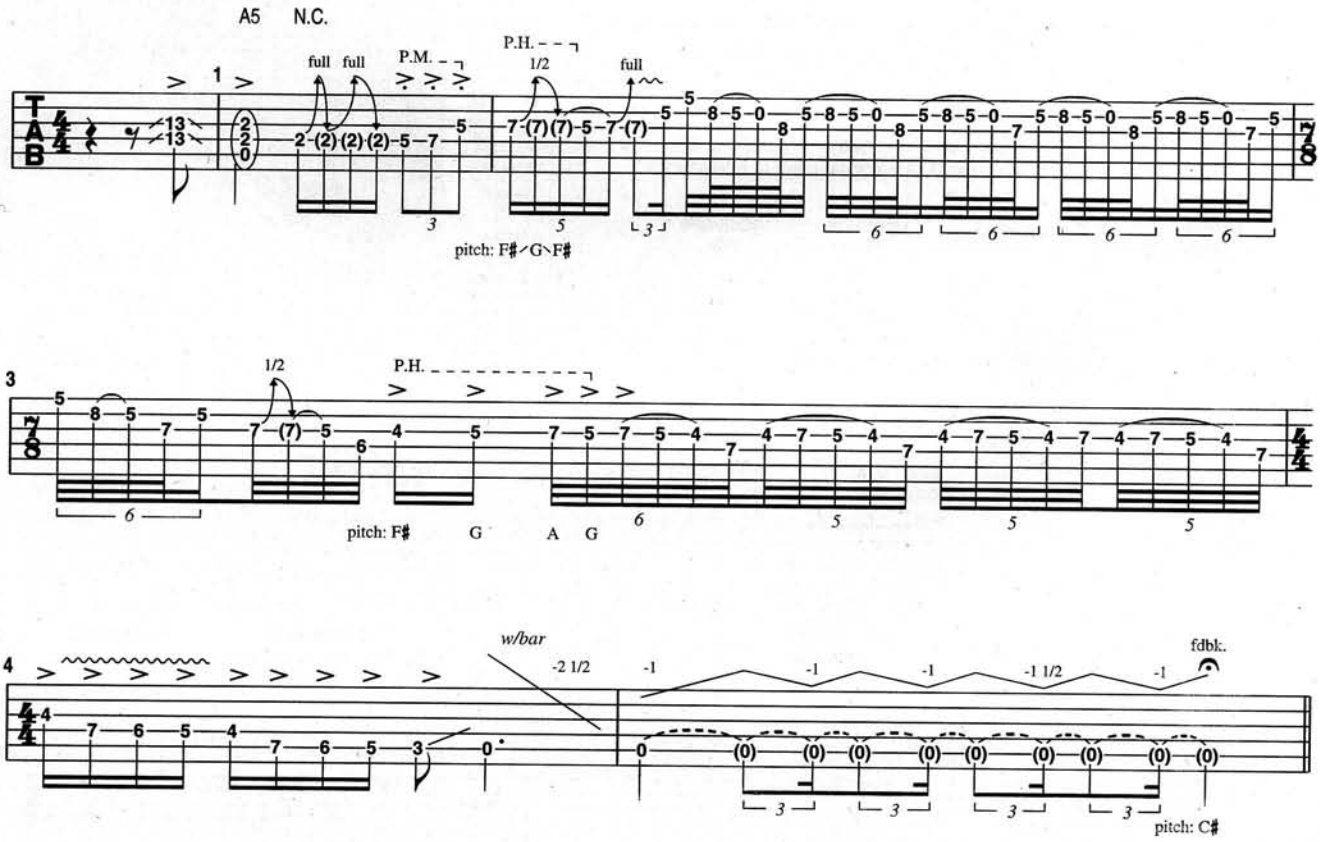
AT 23, EDWARD VAN HALEN SET THE BAR FOR ROCK GUITAR WITH "ERUPTION," HIS MASTERPIECE OF TWO-HANDED TAPPING. *GUITAR WORLD* HELPS YOU RISE TO HIS CHALLENGE WITH THIS IN-DEPTH LESSON. BY JIMMY BROWN

"Eruption"

Electric guitar (bridge pickup on) w/power tube distortion, slow phase-shifting effect and studio reverb.
Tune guitar down one half step (low to high: E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ B♭ E♭).
All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written.

FIGURE 1 bars 1-5 (0:02-0:17)

Free Time (♩ = 92)



ERUPTION By Edward Van Halen, Alex Van Halen, Michael Anthony and David Lee Roth
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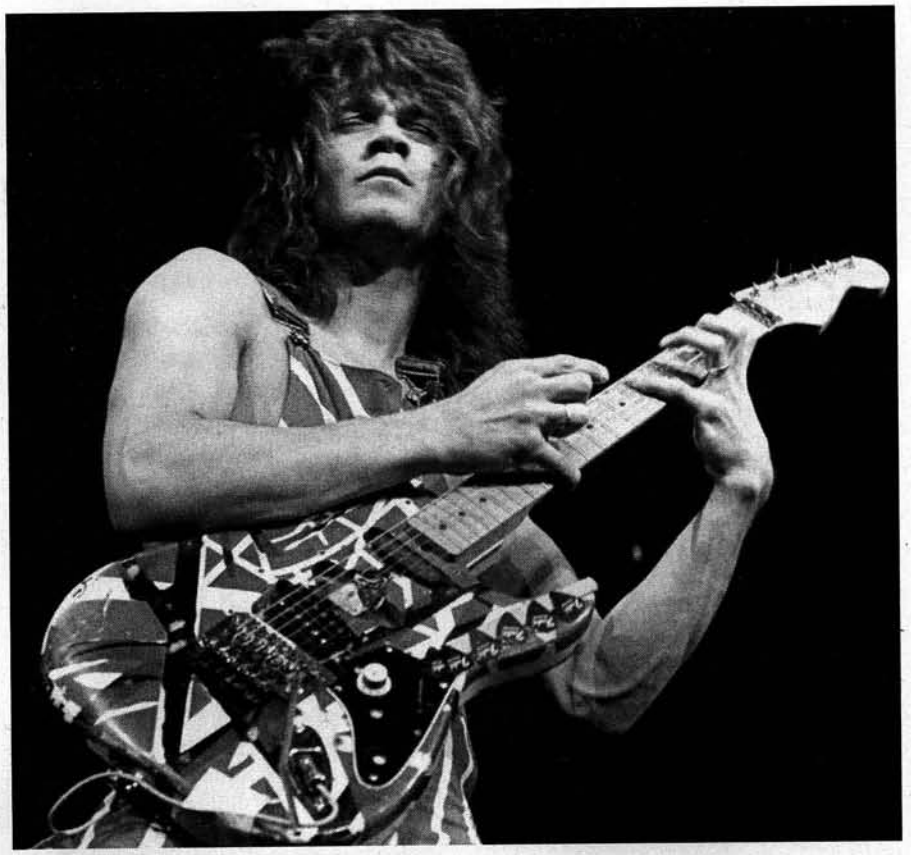
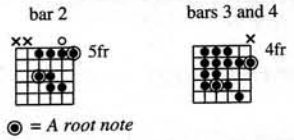


EVER SINCE Edward Van Halen shook the world of rock with his explosive guitar extravaganza "Eruption" (*Van Halen*, 1978), the guitarist's mostly unaccompanied cadenza-style performance has stood as the genre's most celebrated expression of technical innovation. In the course of one minute and 42 seconds, Van Halen—armed with his custom-built ax, cranked-up amp and subtly applied electronic effects—elevated rock lead guitar playing from a folk tradition to a fine art. With his bigger-than-life tone and unorthodox, virtuoso playing techniques, some of which were completely alien to most guitarists at the time, the brilliant young Californian created a musical masterpiece marked by breathtaking, vibrant soundscapes and sophisticated, classical-flavored melodic inventions. With "Eruption," Van Halen inspired and influenced an entire generation of high-tech guitarists and raised the proverbial bar in terms of what constitutes "flash" guitar playing and great tone.

In this lesson we'll present a streamlined, tab-only transcription of "Eruption," broken into digestible bites, and cover the various techniques Van Halen used to perform each section of the piece. Before we get into the music, however, we'll delineate the relevant gear the guitarist employed to achieve the world-renowned and seemingly elusive tone featured on this classic recording. This interesting information will hopefully give you some ideas about how you might be able to closely emulate Van Halen's "Eruption" sound with the equipment available to you.

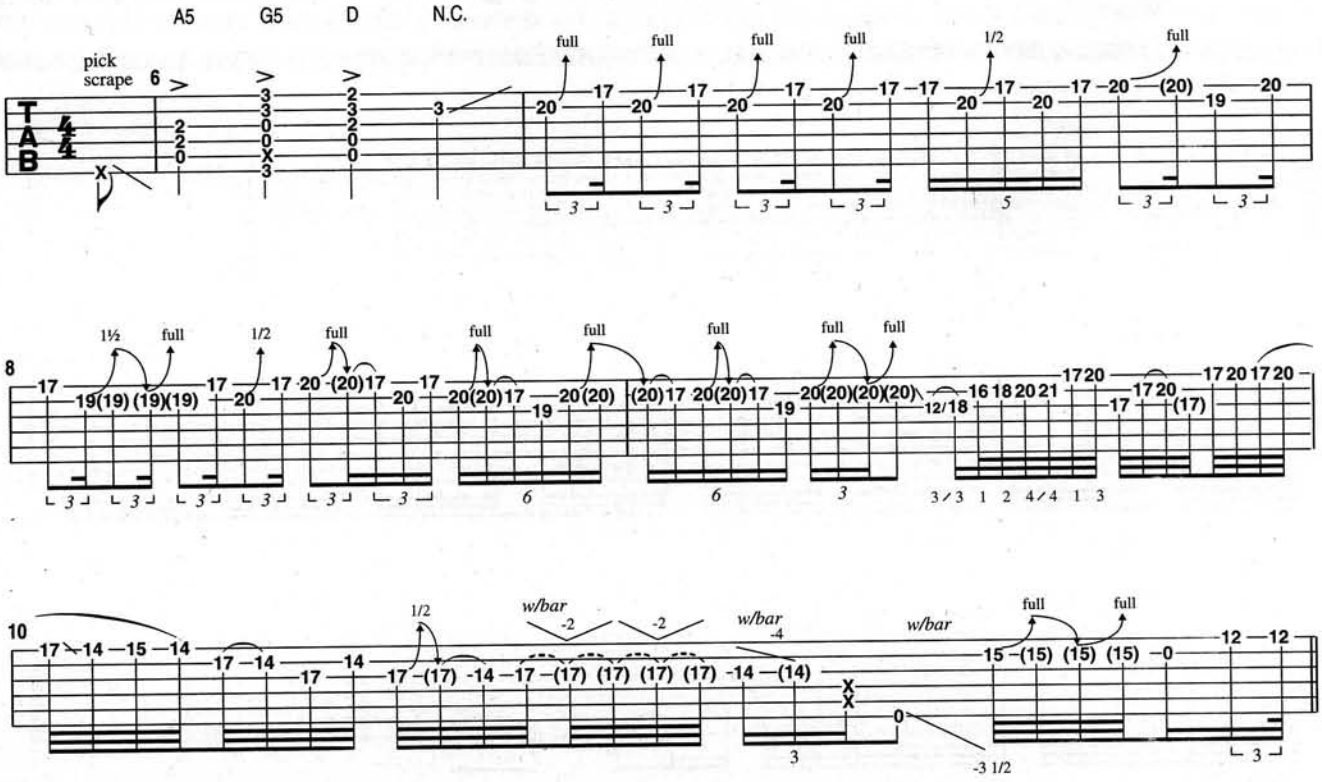
FIGURE 1A fretboard patterns



DR. VAN HALEN'S MONSTER

Edward recorded "Eruption" on his homemade "Frankenstein" (a.k.a., Frankenstrat) guitar, a lean, mean fighting machine he assembled himself in 1975 from what were then relatively cheap and readily available components. The ax—which was Edward's

FIGURE 2 bars 6-10 (0:18-0:30)



main guitar during the *Van Halen* period—sported a Charvel Stratocaster–style ash body and an extra-wide maple neck that was crafted by Linn Ellsworth of Boogie Body Guitars and outfitted with Gibson jumbo frets and Schaller tuners. Onto the guitar's body Van Halen mounted, in the bridge position, a single P.A.F. humbucking pickup from a 1961 Gibson ES-335, the coils of which he rewound himself and dipped in paraffin wax to help insulate the pickup from microphonic feedback that can occur when playing with distortion at high volume. Because the guitar's body was pre-routed to house three Strat-style single-coil pickups, Edward had to remove additional wood from the angled bridge pickup slot in order for it to accommodate the much wider P.A.F. pickup.

The guitar sported a single volume control from an old Gibson Les Paul Jr. and did not have a tone control. Although Edward would later pioneer the use of the now-popular Floyd Rose tremolo bridge system in his whammy-inflected guitar solos, the Frankenstrat was equipped with a traditional Fender tremolo bridge cannibalized from a '57 Strat during the period that he recorded *Van Halen*. To help stabilize the bridge and keep the strings in tune, Edward wedged a quarter under it.

"I really felt I was on to something when I built that guitar," Van Halen told *Guitar World* a few years back. "You couldn't buy anything like it at the time."

Van Halen strung the guitar with a set of .009s (.009–.042) and tuned his strings a half step below standard tuning (low to high: Eb Ab Db Gb Bb Eb). The combination of the light strings and slackened tuning, along with a demandingly precise setup of the guitar's neck and action, gave the instrument a "sponge-y" feel with excellent "traction" that was well suited for Edward's flashy, acrobatic playing style.

HEAD OF THE CLASS

Another key element of Van Halen's amazing tone on "Eruption" is the way he amplified the signal from his guitar. "There's a big difference between just being loud and having what I call a warm, 'brown' sound, which is a toney sound," the guitarist once said in an early interview. "Some people get a sound like an amplified AM radio. I like it to be like a nice home stereo—the difference between tone and no tone." Van Halen's choice of amplifier for the recording of "Eruption" was a 1967 Marshall Super Lead head (#1959 SLP model), which he used to drive a Marshall 4x12 cabinet loaded with Celestion speakers. Although he has employed dozens of different amps made by Marshall and other manufacturers for his live performances over the years, Edward has reserved this particular head for the majority of his studio work because of the superlative, and perhaps unique, tone it delivers when cranked up "full throttle."

The highly coveted, vintage Marshall #1959 SLP head, commonly referred to as the "plexi" because of its Plexiglas front panel, was a 100-watt, all-tube, Non Master Volume design, equipped with three 12AX7 pre-amp tubes and four EL34 power tubes. The amp, which is not considered "high gain" by today's standards, sported four inputs, two separate channels (Bright and Normal) and controls for volume, bass, middle, treble and presence. To provide better ventilation for the tubes and keep them from overheating, Van Halen removed the amp's back panel.

POWER TUBE TRIP

As far as Edward Van Halen is concerned, there's no distortion like power tube distortion. "The only way I can make my Marshall work is if it's turned all the way up," the guitarist stated in one of his early interviews. To really pull that crunchy tone from the SLP's power tubes without making the amplifier unbearably loud, Edward, in one of his many strokes of genius, connected it to an Ohmite Variac transformer, a device that regulates the amount of voltage an appliance receives from 0 to 140 volts. The Variac enabled him to crank the amp's volume control to the max in order to overdrive the power tubes while enabling him to play at manageable volume levels.

"When we played in clubs, the amp would be too loud and it would feed back," Van Halen said. "I tried using a dimmer switch to attenuate the volume, but it fried a fuse when I hooked it up to the house. So one day I went down to Radio Shack and bought a Variac, which worked great. I always used it for recording in the early days, before I started sitting in the control room with the guitar. Whenever the amp would feed back, I'd just turn it down with the Variac."

GOING THROUGH A PHASE

Although Van Halen's instrument and amplifier were certainly key factors in the creation of his "brown" sound featured on "Eruption," another crucial ingredient of his legendary sonic brew was his use of an MXR Phase 90 pedal, the speed of which he set

FIGURE 2A fretboard patterns

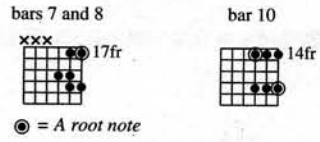
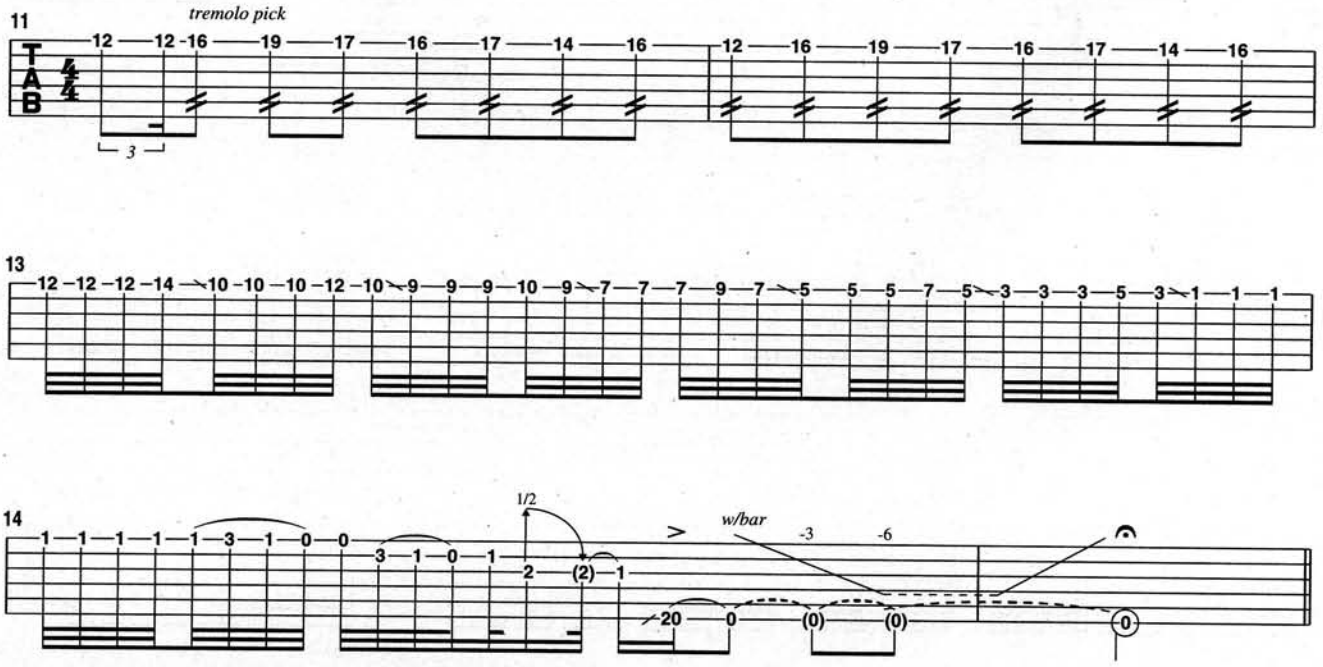


FIGURE 3 bars 11-15 (0:30-0:46)



on slow. (Aside from the on/off switch, the speed knob is the unit's only control.) Early in his career, Edward would often kick in the Phase 90 for his solos and use it as a sort of signal booster. It ended up being one of his coolest effects; it's what gave his guitar that chewy, swirling sound, as featured on "Eruption" and many other classic Van Halen tracks, like "Atomic Punk" and "Ice Cream Man."

Other than the Phase 90, the only other effects Van Halen used on "Eruption" were a Univox tape echo unit, which he only engaged for the octave dive-bomb that closes the piece, and some dripping-wet, cavernous plate reverb, which was added to the track in the studio.

ONE PHRASE AT A TIME

"Eruption" begins as if the piece were a rock and roll grand finale to another song. **FIGURE 1** depicts the first five bars, which are preceded on the recording by a brief drum fill played by Alex Van Halen. Edward enters with a long finger slide up and down the fretboard, performed by barring his index finger across the G and D strings. He follows this on the downbeat of the first measure with a big, fat open A5 chord, with bassist Michael Anthony doubling the root note of the chord an octave lower on bass as Alex plays a fast cymbal roll.

Edward follows this sustained A5 chord with an unusual index-finger bend, which he performs by pulling the fourth string in toward his palm—as opposed to the more conventional bending technique of pushing the string away from the palm. He repeats this move, then quickly shifts his hand up to the fifth-position A blues scale (A C D Eb E G) box pattern and fires off a salvo of lightning-fast "crammed" licks as the bass and drums come to a rest. **FIGURE 1A** illustrates the fretboard pattern Van Halen uses for this measure.

The bend on the downbeat of bar 2 is executed by pushing the G string away from the palm with the ring finger. (The middle finger may be used to help push the string.) Van Halen uses this same string-pushing technique to play all the remaining bends in "Eruption."

Van Halen begins bar 2 with one of his signature "pinch harmonics" (indicated by the abbreviation P.H.), which he then bends up a half step. For those who are unfamiliar with the pinch harmonic technique, it is performed by first "choking up" on the pick and grabbing it near the tip, so that the thumb grazes the string as you pick it. (The technique only works with a downstroke). The harmonic is produced as a result of the thumb touching one of the harmonic node points along the string as it is picked. There are several node points along the length of each string, each generating a different harmonic, and their locations are different for each fretted note. In this case, the desired F# overtone indicated below the tablature is sounded by picking the string approximately 3.25 inches from the bridge. Of course, you'll need to do a little bit of experimentation to find that sweet spot.

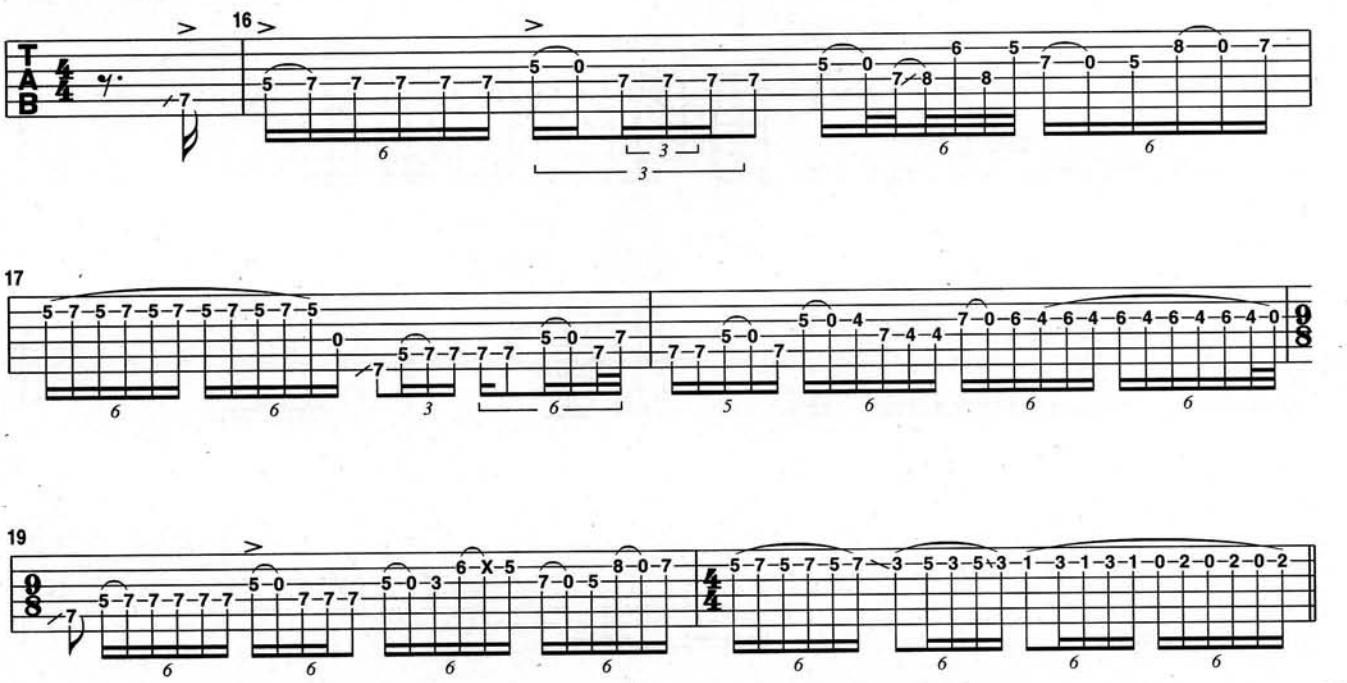
Beginning on beat two of bar 2, Van Halen employs combinations of hammer-ons and double pull-offs to create a fluid legato line. Notice the way he uses the open B note in conjunction with the fretted notes in the fifth position to add some wide intervals to the line and give it an unusual and interesting melodic contour.

Each of the curved lines arching over a group of tab numbers indicates that only the first note under the arch is to be articulated with the pick; the remaining notes are to be sounded entirely with the left hand. A higher note on the same string is to be hammered on with another finger, such as the ring finger or pinkie; a lower note is sounded by pulling off from a higher note. This technique is a little more involved than a hammer-on, which literally involves hammering a finger onto a string. In order to keep the string vibrating when doing a pull-off, the finger actually needs to yank, or pull, the string in toward the palm slightly just before letting go of it.

Van Halen does a slight position shift on beat two of bar 3 as he reaches his index finger down to the fourth fret on the G string to play another fast hammer-on/pull-off sequence. **FIGURE 1A** illustrates the fretboard shape he employs for this bar and the one that follows. He finishes the phrase in bar 4 with a descending chromatic line on the fourth and fifth strings, picking each 16th note with a heavy downstroke. If you listen to the recording, you'll notice how he digs in really hard with the pick here, almost sounding a pinch harmonic with each note. To reproduce this aggressive note attack, choke up on the pick, holding it near the tip so that your thumb grazes the string with each downstroke.

Edward concludes this opening phrase with a quick finger slide up the neck, which he immediately follows with a deep, gut-wrenching whammy bar dive on the open low E string, executed by pressing down on the bar. Before completely "resurfacing" from the dive, he picks the open A string, with the resulting slackened pitch being G. He holds the bar in this position for a brief moment, then releases it, restoring the pitch of the open string to A. As the note continues to ring, Eddie proceeds to push down on the bar a few times, causing the pitch of the note to

FIGURE 4 bars 16-20 (0:47-0:57)



dip slightly.

FIGURE 2 shows the second phrase of "Eruption," which commences at 0:18 on the recording. Edward kicks off this five-bar section with a long descending pick scrape that flows into an open A5 chord. In a bit of orchestral-style fanfare, the guitarist then proceeds to play a roaring power chord cadence (A5-G5-D) in free time, with the bass and drums accompanying on cue.

Edward follows this last bit of ensemble play at the end of bar 6 with a long finger slide up the B string to the 17th position, where he lets loose with a flurry of bend licks as the rhythm section fades away. **FIGURE 2A** illustrates the fretboard pattern he uses to play these licks.

Notice how quickly and seamlessly Van Halen alternates between the G-to-A bends at the 20th fret on the B string and the unbent A note at the 17th fret on the high E string in bar 7. The one-and-one-half-step bend at the 19th fret during beat one of bar 8 is executed by pushing the B string away from the palm with both the middle and index fingers.

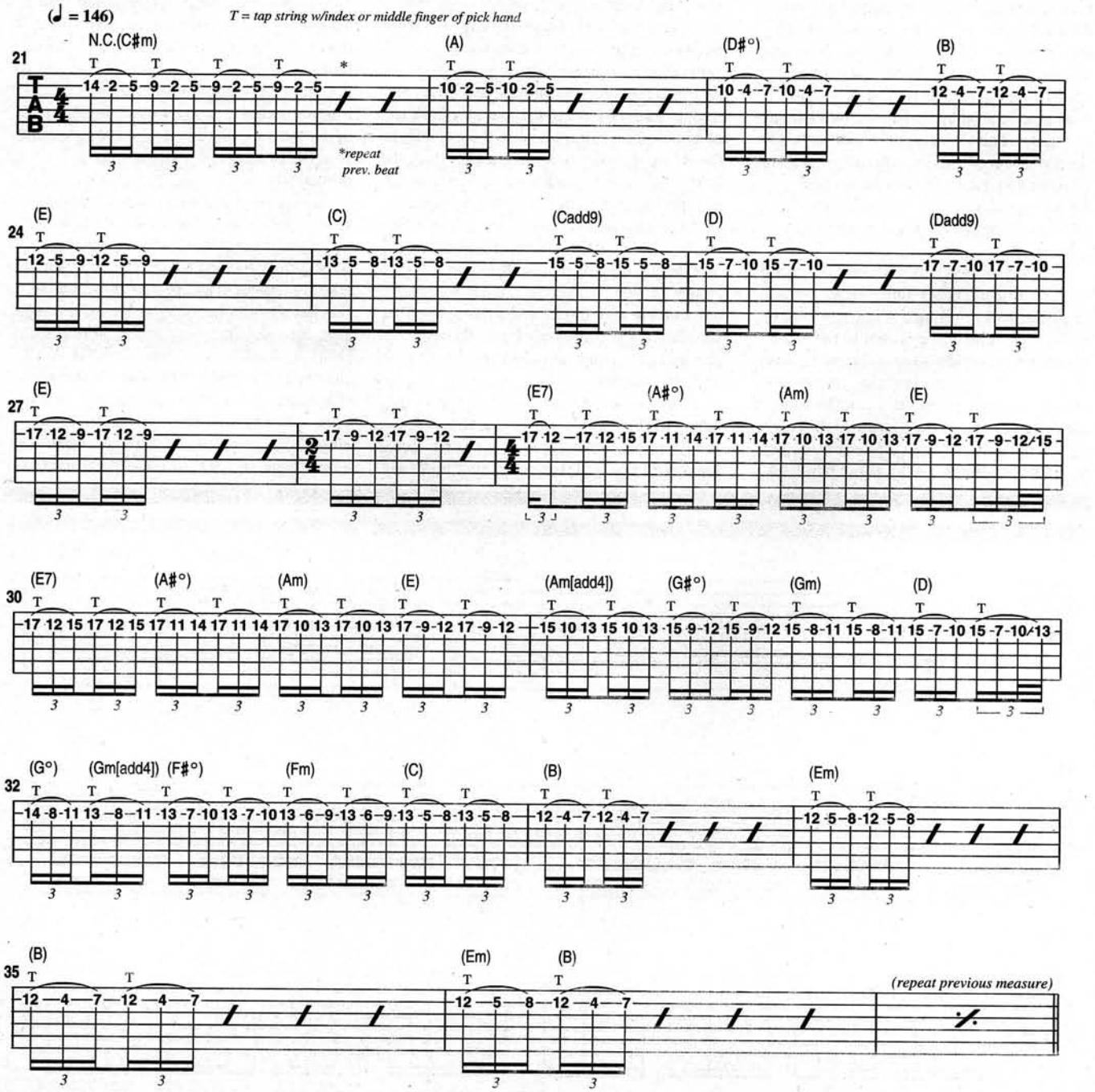
Van Halen briefly ventures outside the 17th-position box pattern during beat three of bar 9 with an atonal-flavored ascending run, using down-up alternate picking for a machine gun–like attack. To ensure a smooth transition into this lick, be sure to perform the slide from the 12th fret up to the 18th fret on beat three with the ring finger.

In bar 10, Van Halen shifts down to the 14th position via an index-finger slide and rips out more lightning-fast–blues licks, this time using the somewhat mutated A major pentatonic box pattern depicted in **FIGURE 2A** as his fretboard template. Notice how Eddie seamlessly combines legato hammer-ons and pull-offs with push bends and whammy bar dips to create a flowing, smoothly contoured phrase. Edward concludes this section with another deep whammy bar dive on the open low E string and a soulful D-to-E bend at the 15th fret on the B string.

PICKY, PICKY

Van Halen switches musical gears for the next five measures (bars 11–15, shown here in **FIGURE 5**), using tremolo picking to play a

FIGURE 5 bars 21-37 (0:57-1:23)



lyrical melodic theme on the high E string. During the first two bars of this section the guitarist borrows a phrase from Caprice Study #2 for Violin by Rodolphe Kreutzer, a piece he had studied as a young violin student. (Edward was also classically trained on the piano before he began playing guitar.)

For those who may be unfamiliar with this technique, tremolo picking involves rapidly rearticulating the same note with alternating pick strokes (down-up-down-up).

In bar 13 Van Halen continues tremolo picking on the high E string while gracefully descending the fretboard to the first position via a series of subtle index-finger slides. Upon reaching the first position, he seamlessly segues into some creamy legato hammer-ons and pull-offs in the first position, using the open high E and B strings in conjunction with fretted notes. Edward concludes the phrase with a quick pre-bend and release on the G string, a high finger slide up the low E string and a bowel-loosening one-octave whammy bar dive on the open E note.

FIGURE 4 illustrates the next section of "Eruption," beginning at 0:47. Returning to the familiar fifth-position A minor pentatonic box, Van Halen unleashes a tempest of notes here, combining tremolo picking with pull-offs to the open G and B strings and classical-style trills. (A trill is a rapidly repeating alternation between two notes, typically performed on the guitar on a single string, using hammer-ons and pull-offs in combination.) Notice how Van Halen strays outside the fifth-position A minor pentatonic box pattern in just about every measure as he adds "color" tones at the fourth and sixth frets.

PLAYING TAPS

Edward finishes this fourth phrase with a descending legato line on the B string that sets up the piece's "grand finale" two-hand tapping section, shown here in **FIGURE 5.** As you can see, Van Halen performs this passage entirely on the B string. Each tapped note, indicated by the letter T, is sounded by hammering the tip of one of the right hand's fingers onto the string just behind the fret. (This is basically the same technique as that used for a fret-hand hammer-on, except in this case the opposite hand is used.)

Van Halen often grips his pick between his thumb and middle fingers and taps with his index finger. Most guitarists, however, prefer to hold the pick between their thumb and index finger and use their middle finger for tapping. Whichever digit you choose to tap with, keep in mind that, in order to keep the string vibrating, you'll need to actually pluck it as you lift your finger off it, pulling the string away from the middle strings as you would when pulling off with the left hand.

Van Halen displays brilliance here as both a musician and composer, as he uses the two-hand tapping technique to effortlessly gallop through a complex progression of triad arpeggios, modulating through different keys in resourceful ways that would make Ludwig van Beethoven raise an eyebrow. Notice the way Van Halen signals the end of the progression by quickly moving back and forth between Em and B (the tonic and dominant chords in the key of E minor) in a way reminiscent of the conclusion of many classical pieces.

FIGURE 5A illustrates, for purposes of musical analysis and ear training, the implied chord progression and voicings produced by Van Halen's tapped arpeggio sequence, presented here as block chords on the top three strings. Listening to and studying this chord progression will help you get the sound of Van Halen's tapped arpeggio sequence implanted in your mind's ear, as well as provide you with an excellent lesson in harmony and voice leading!

Van Halen concludes this passionate, majestic piece with two successive long finger slides on the sixth string, followed by a repeated tapped harmonic at the 12th fret (see **FIGURE 6**). In order to sound and sustain the E harmonic, he taps the string directly above the 12th fret, his tapping finger outstretched and parallel to the fret.

As the second tapped harmonic rings out, the guitarist proceeds to gradually lower the note's pitch exactly one octave with his whammy bar and engages the previously mentioned tape echo effect, with the echo repeats leaving a sonic trail that fades into the background.

FIGURE 5A implied chord progression for tapping section (bars 21-37)

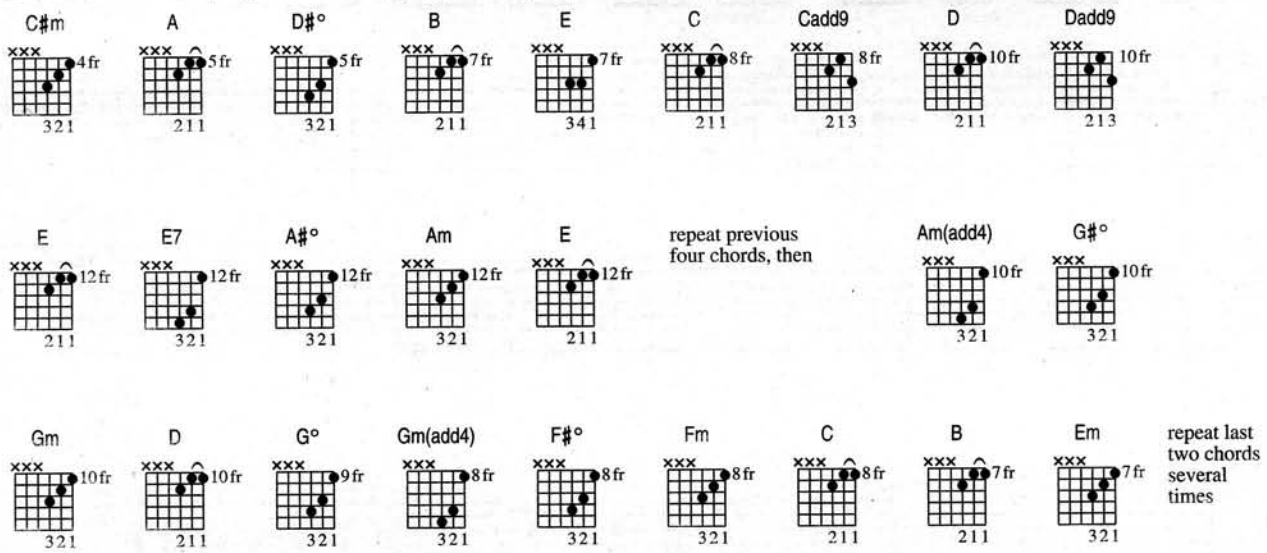
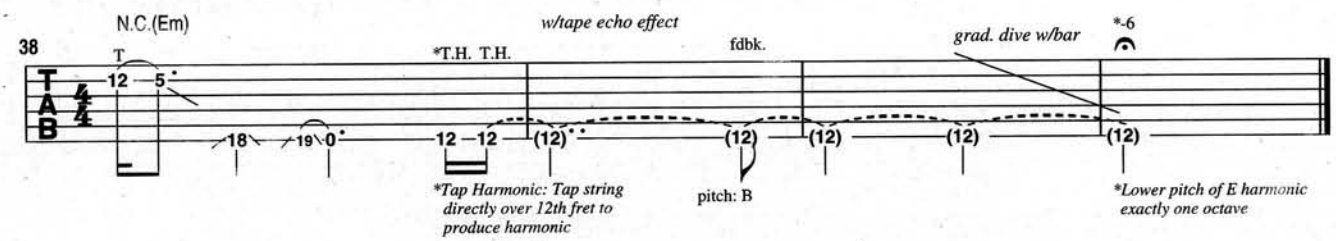


FIGURE 6 bars 38-41 (1:24-1:42)



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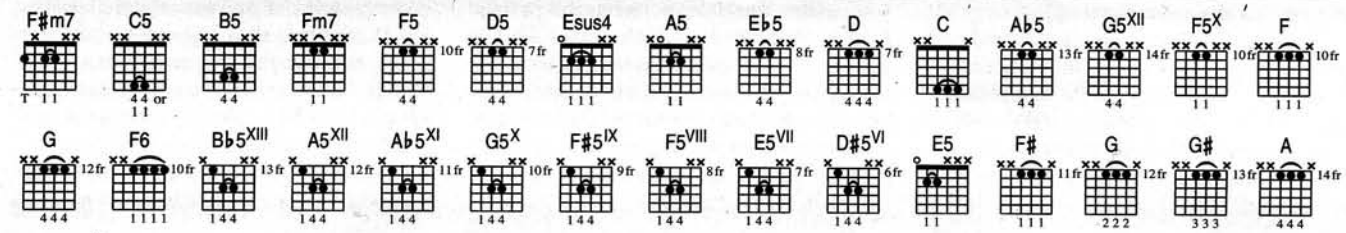
"HOT FOR TEACHER" Van Halen

As heard on ***1984*** (WARNER BROS.)

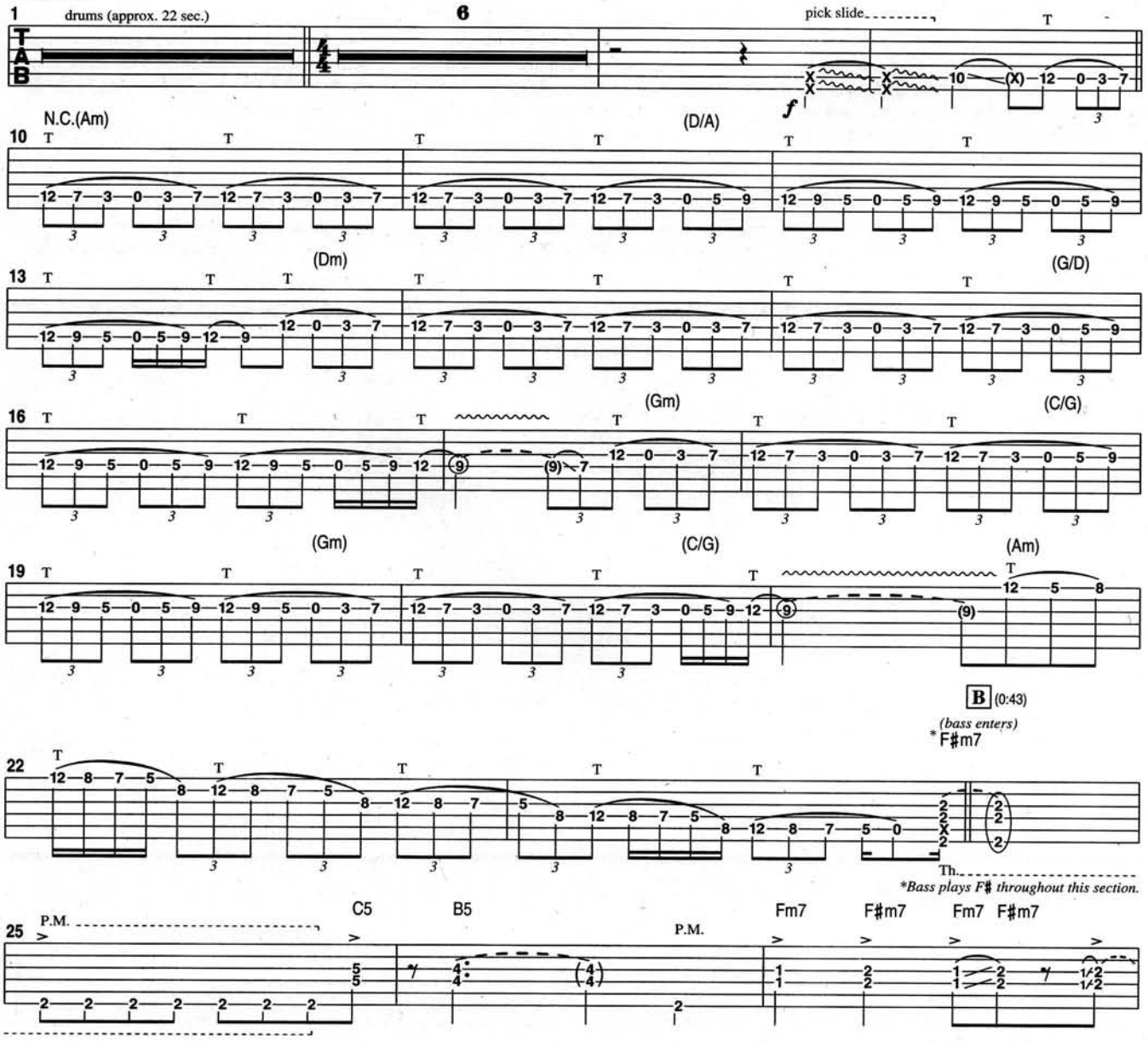
Words and Music by **Edward Van Halen, Alex Van Halen and David Lee Roth** • Transcribed by **Andy Aledort**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Gtr. (w/dist.)

Fast Rock Shuffle ♩ = 253 (♫ = ♩³♪)



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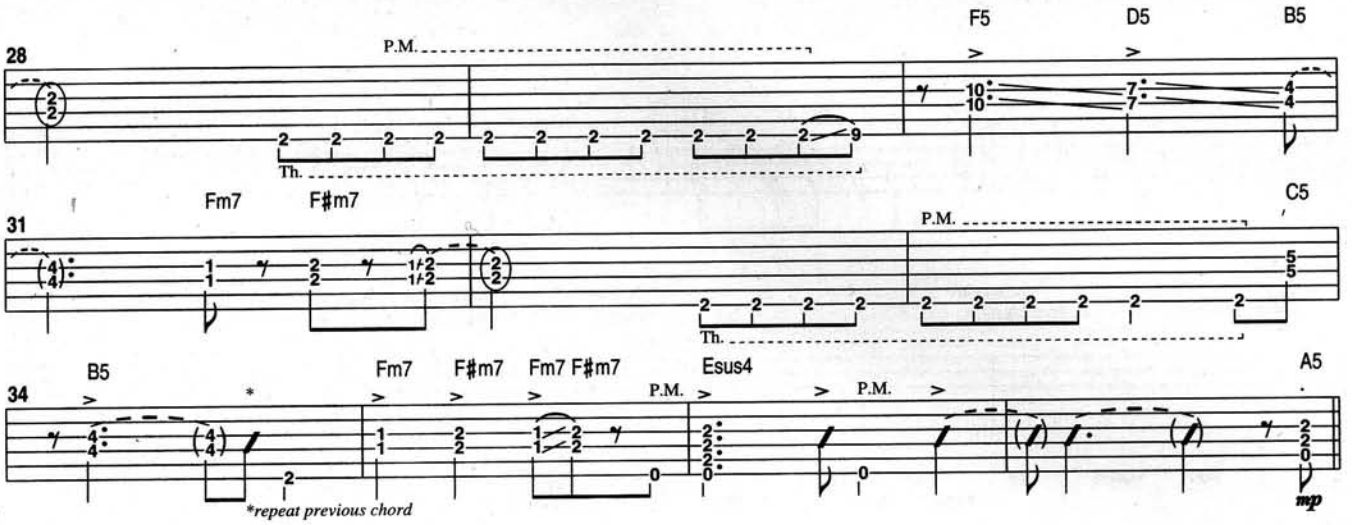
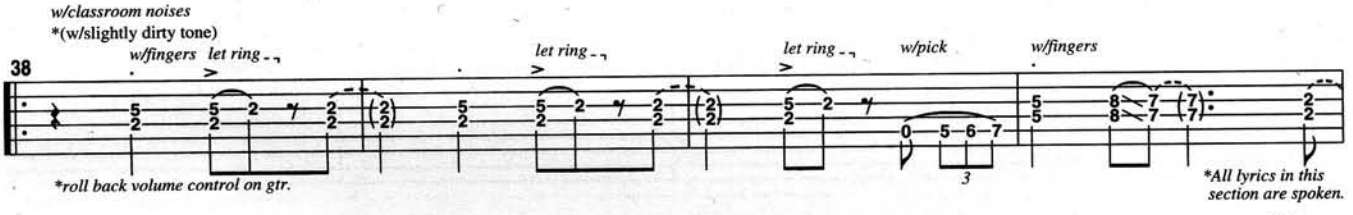


𝄋 C (0:56, 2:00, 3:37)

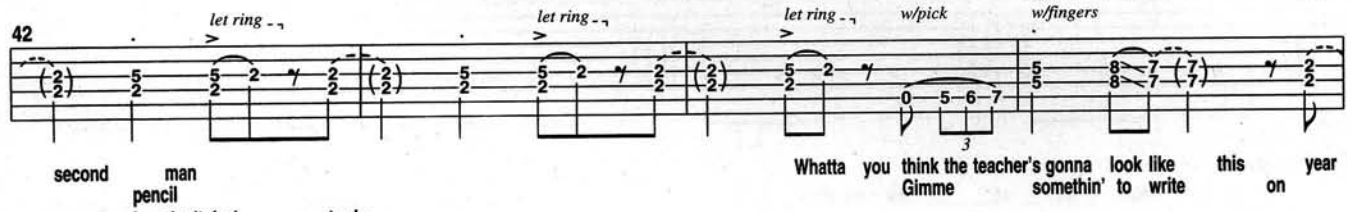
*1. Oh
2. Ay I heard you missed us We're back
3. Aw man I think the clock is

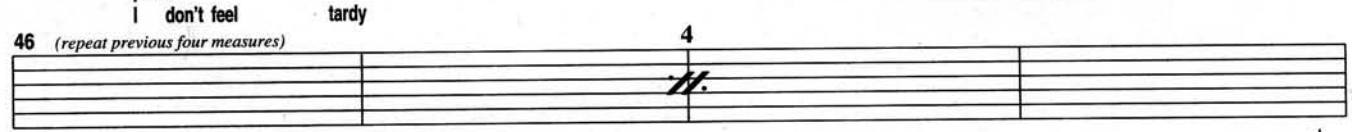
C5 E♭5 D5 A5

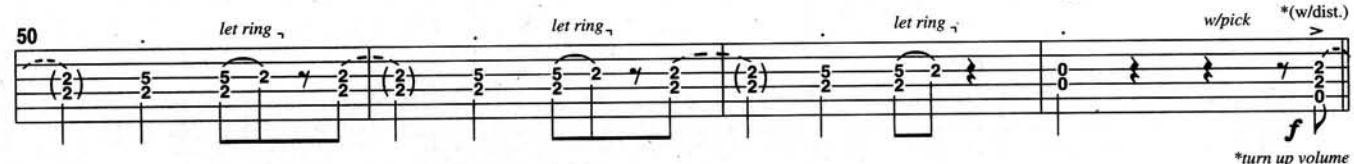


wow man that's it Wait a
slow I brought my
(What are you doing this weekend)

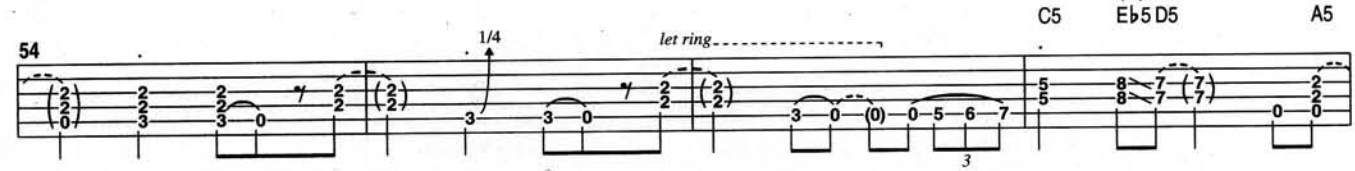
C5 E♭5 D5 A5



second man Whatta you think the teacher's gonna look like this year
pencil Gimme somethin' to write on
I don't feel tardy

(3rd time) To Coda
(skip ahead to meas. 144)

Whoa Ooh
man Ugh
Class dismissed
G5 A5 *(w/dist.)

𝄋 D (1:11, 2:16)

(1.) Oh
(2.) Ooh

C5 E♭5 D5 A5

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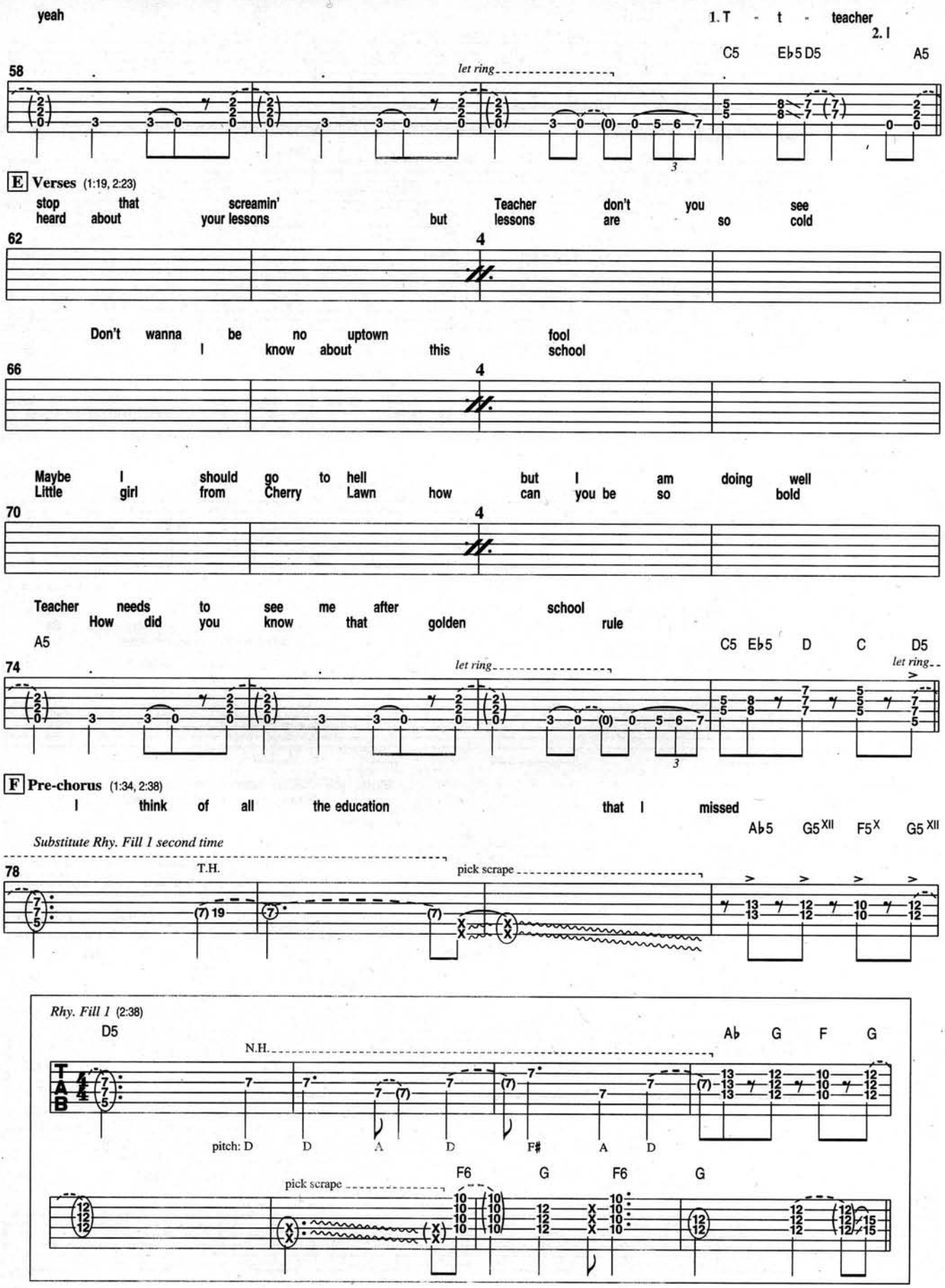
"HOT FOR TEACHER"

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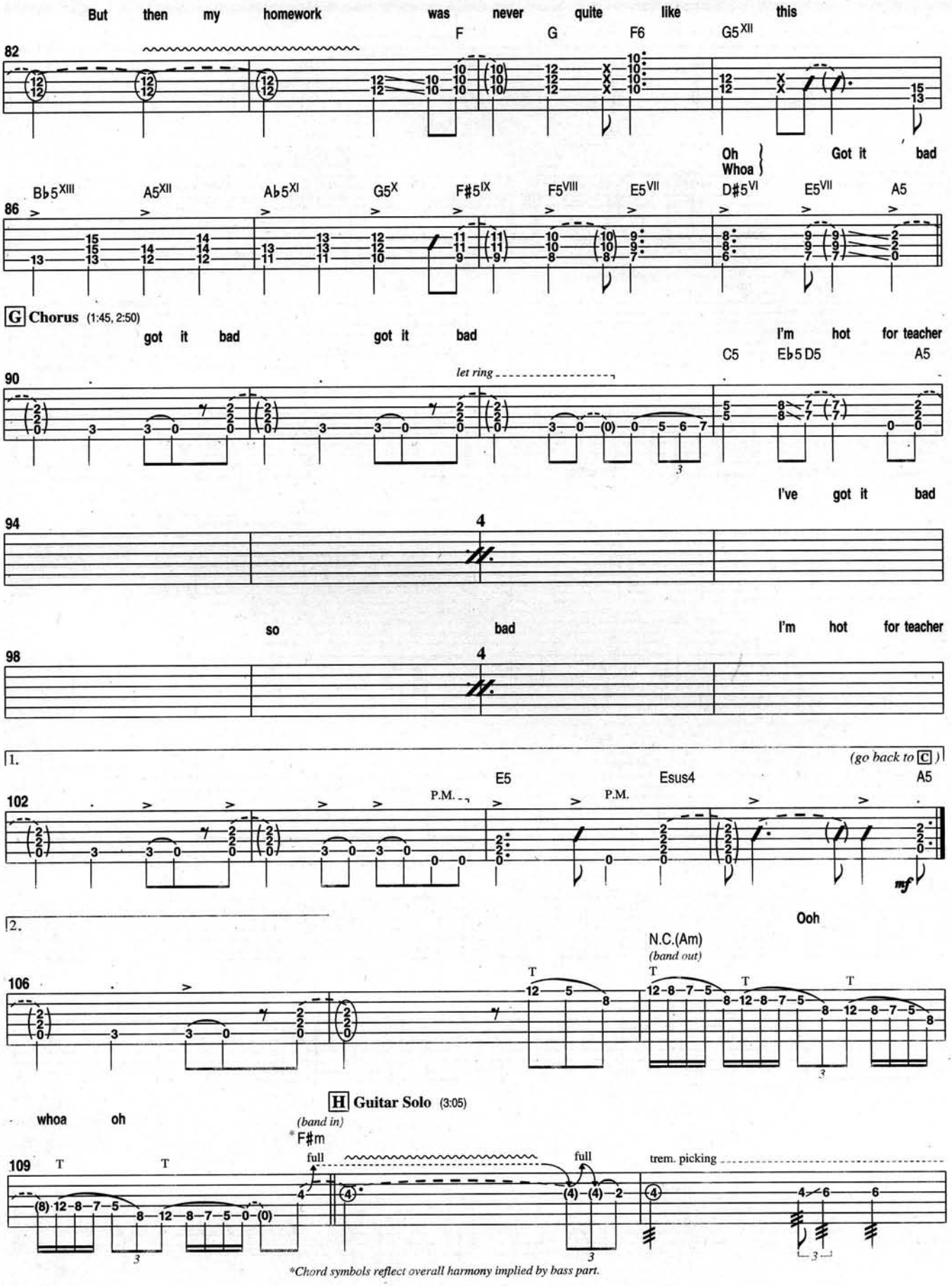
*Chord symbols reflect overall harmony implied by bass part.

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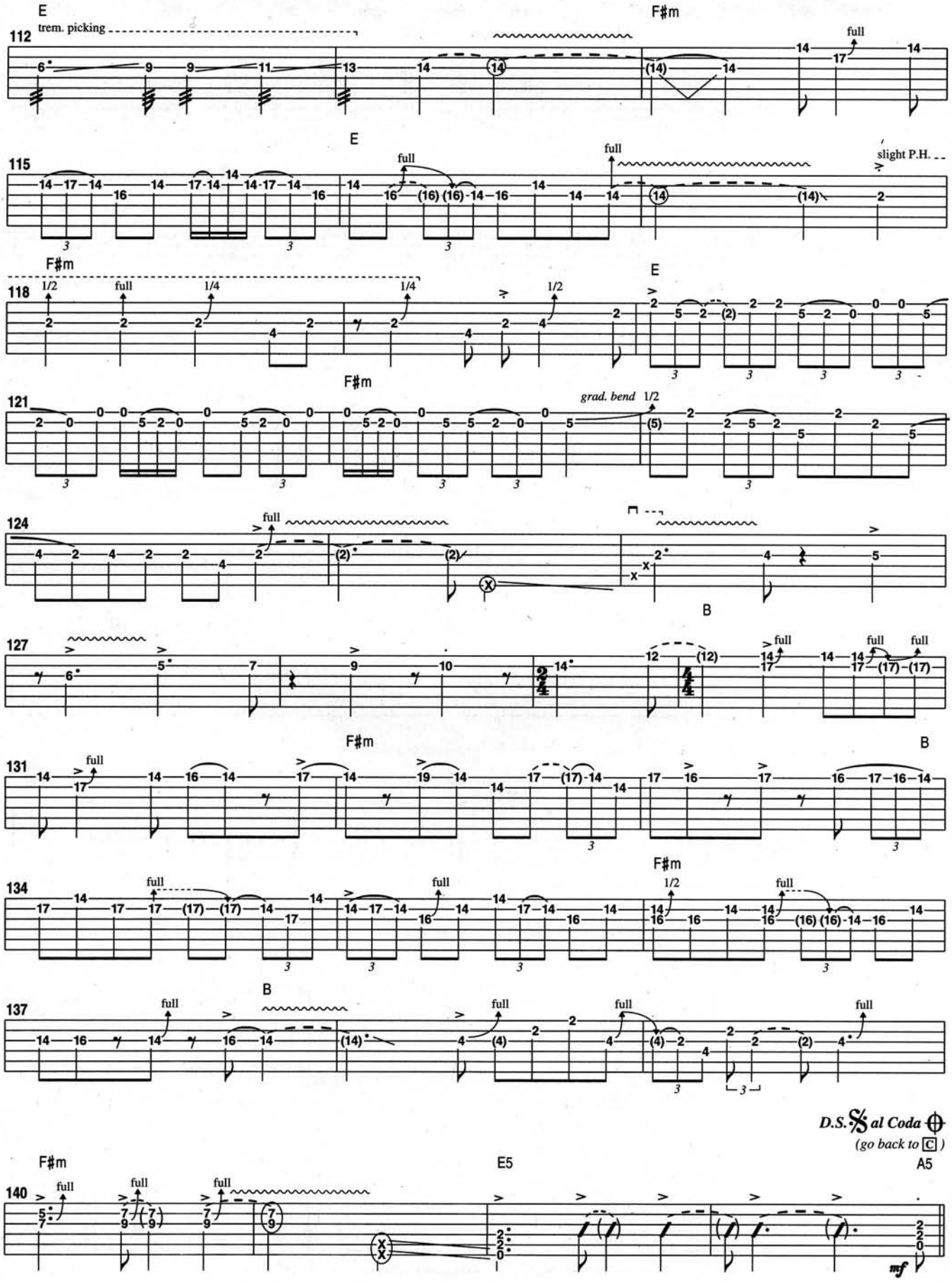
"HOT FOR TEACHER"



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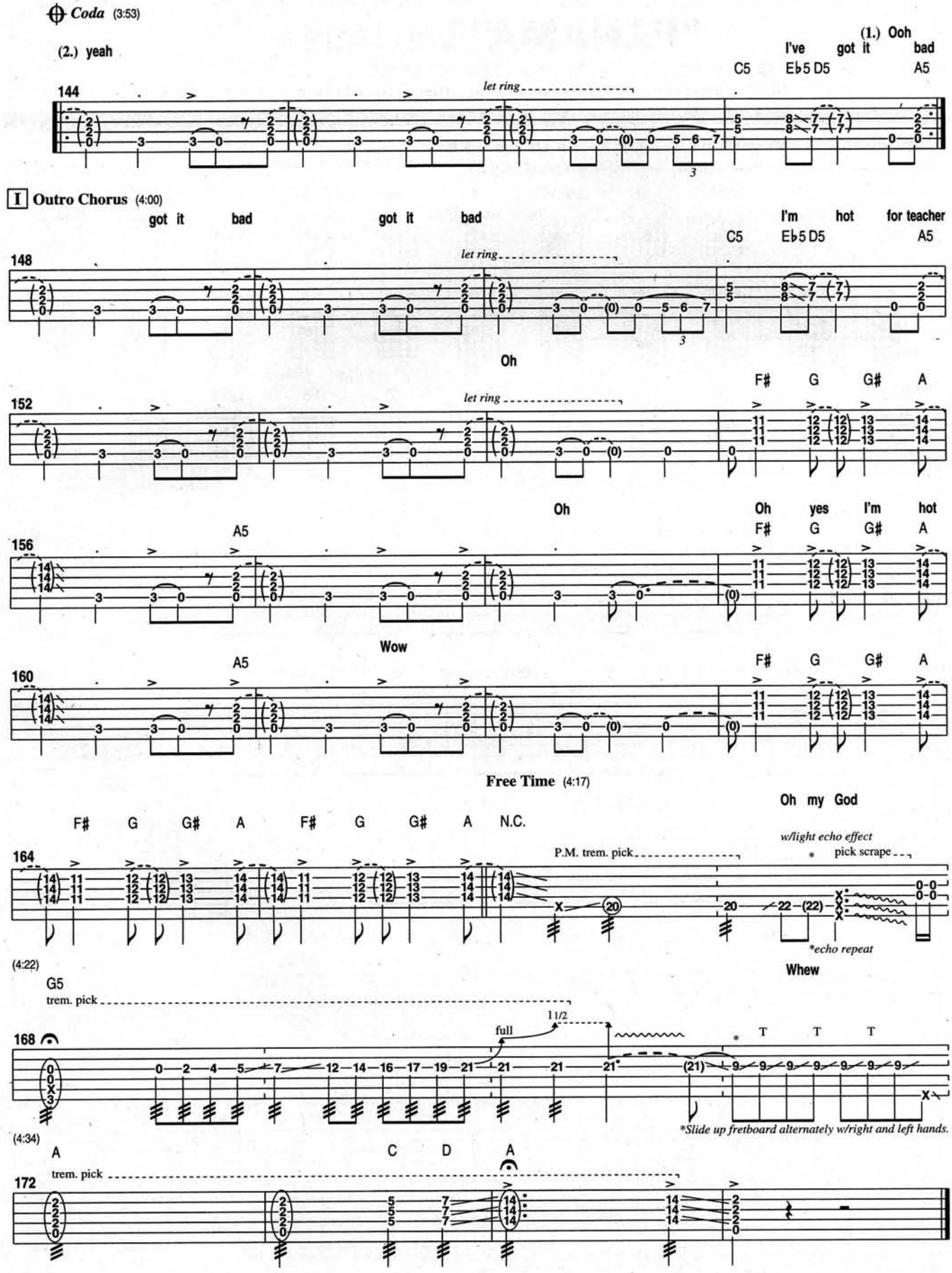

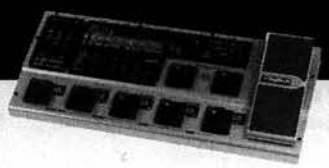

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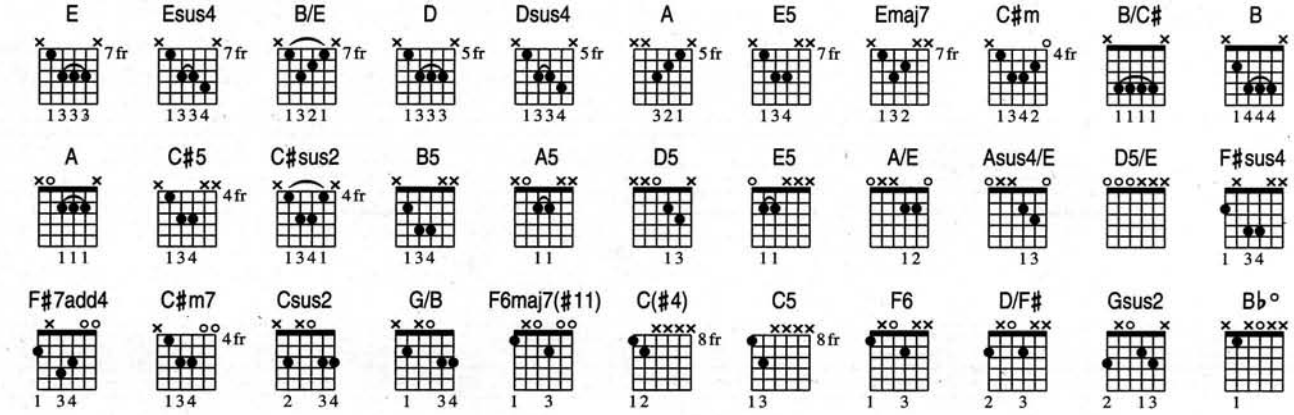
"PANAMA" Van Halen

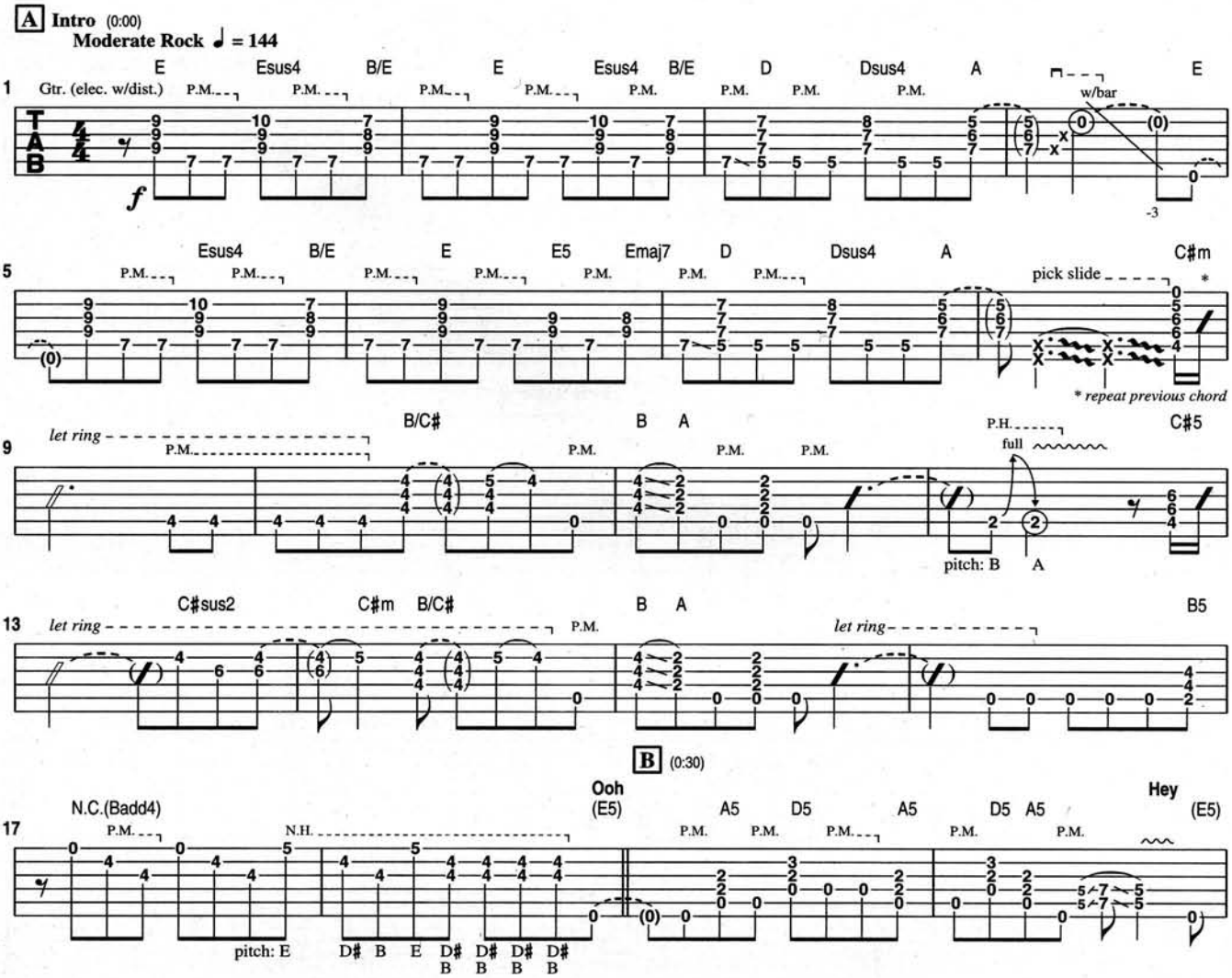
As heard on ***1984*** (WARNER BROS.)

Words and Music by **Edward Van Halen, Alex Van Halen, Michael Anthony and David Lee Roth** • Transcribed by **Andy Aledort**

Tune down one half step (low to high: E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ B♭ E♭).

All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written (key of E♭).





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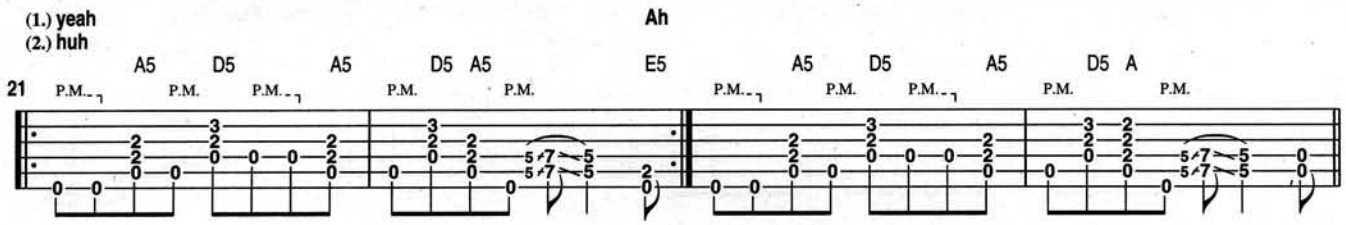
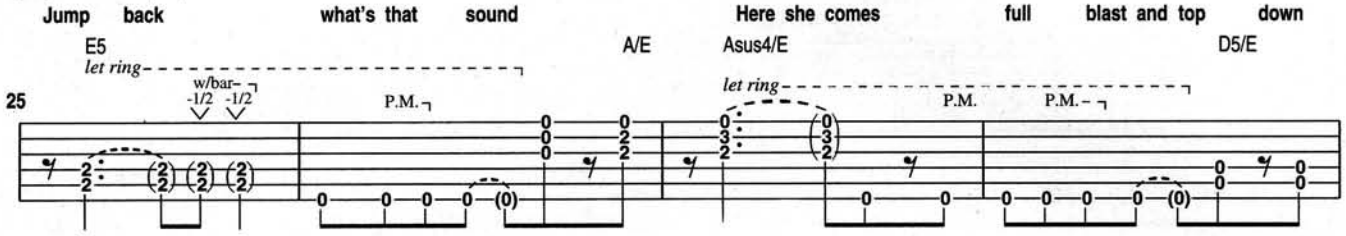
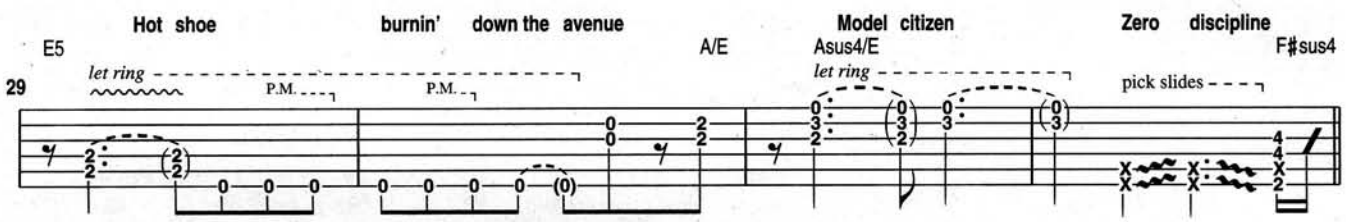
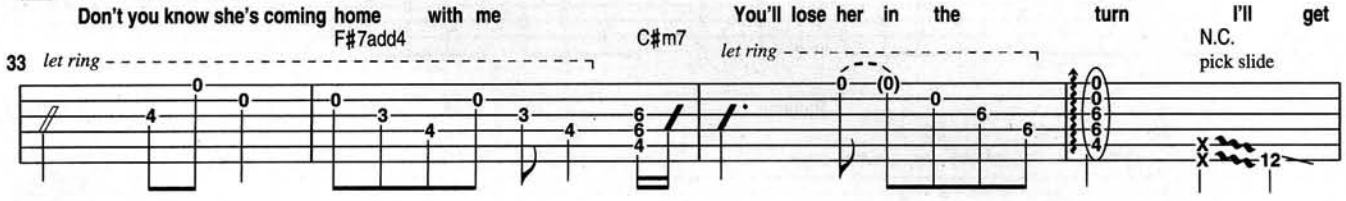
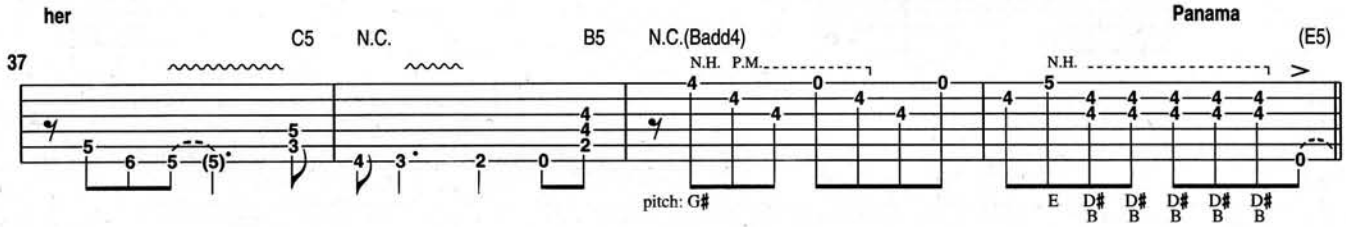


C **1st Verse** (0:43)

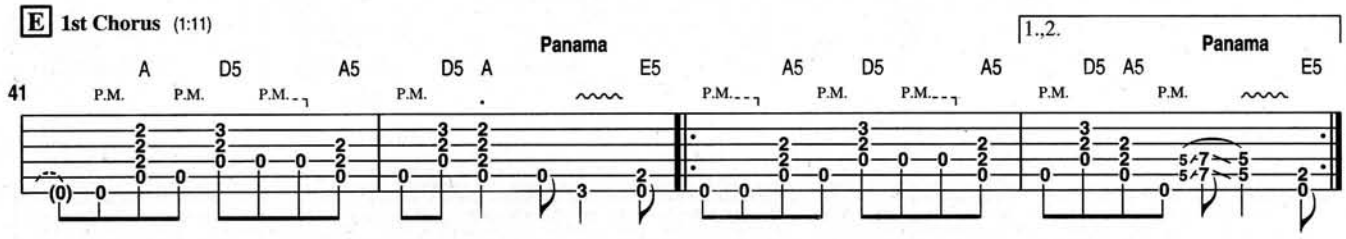


D **1st Pre-chorus** (0:57)



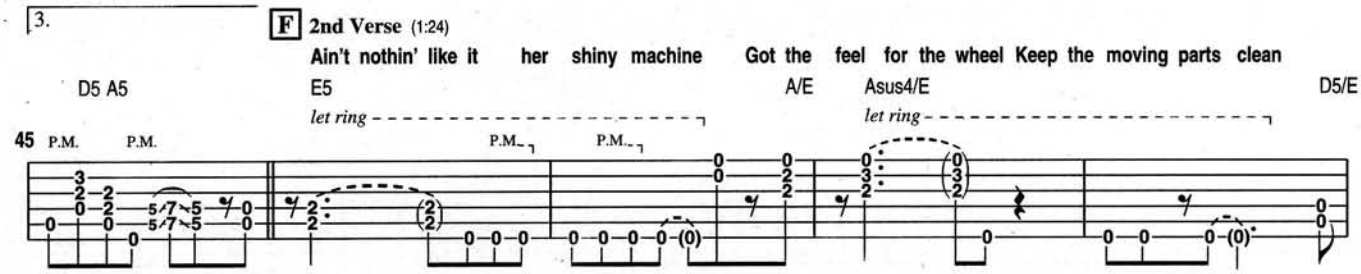


E **1st Chorus** (1:11)



3.

F **2nd Verse** (1:24)



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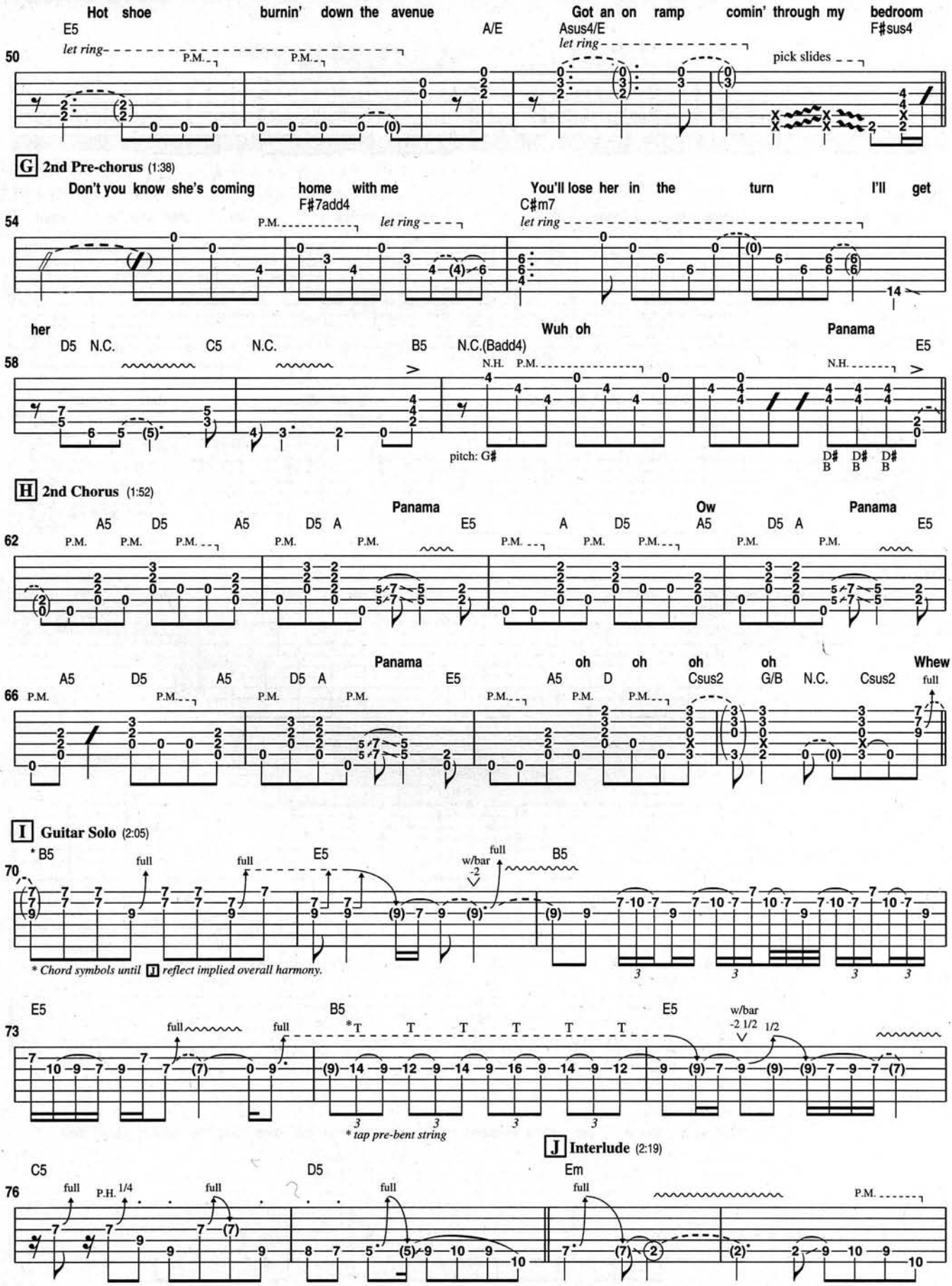
"PANAMA"



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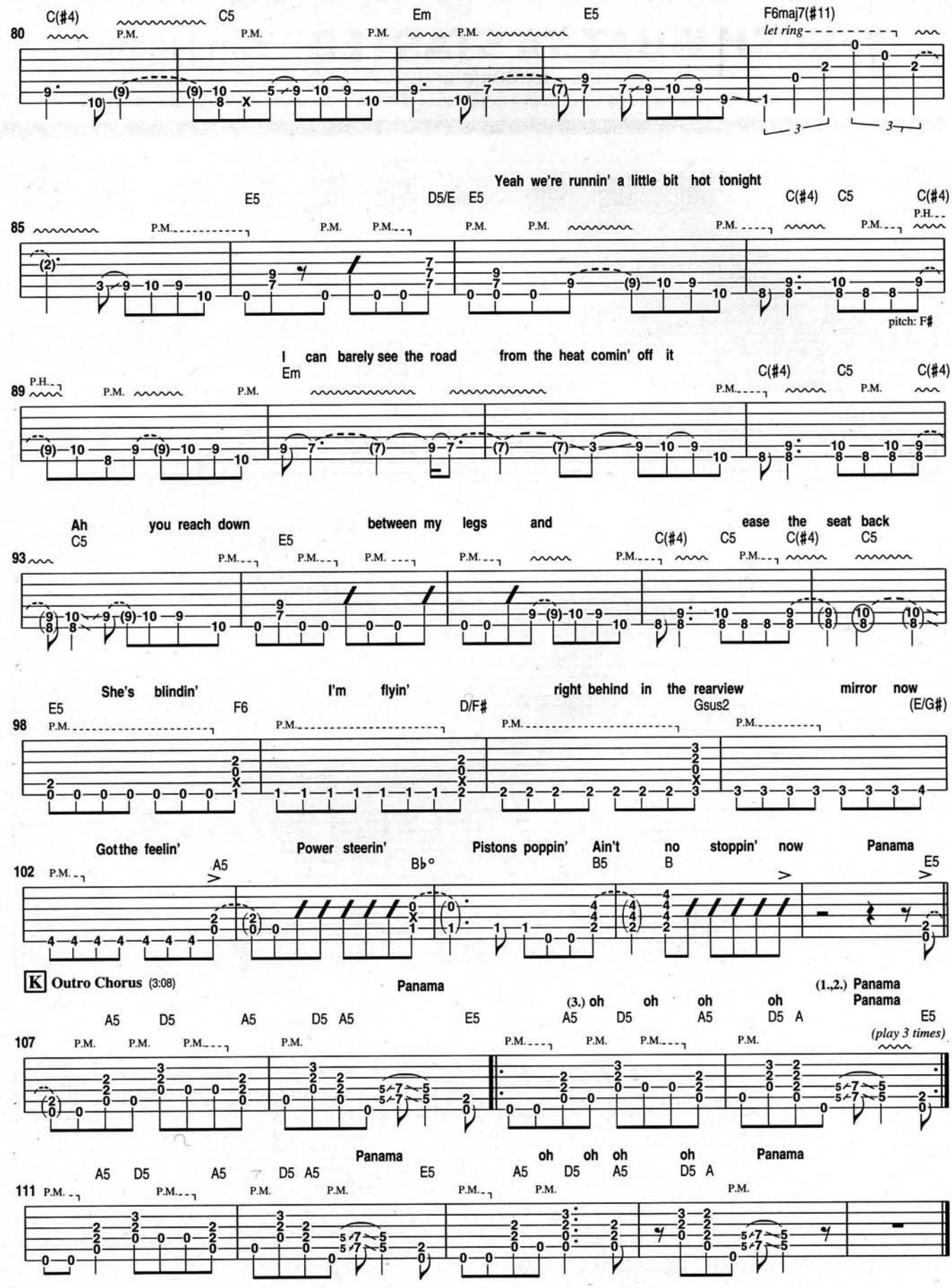
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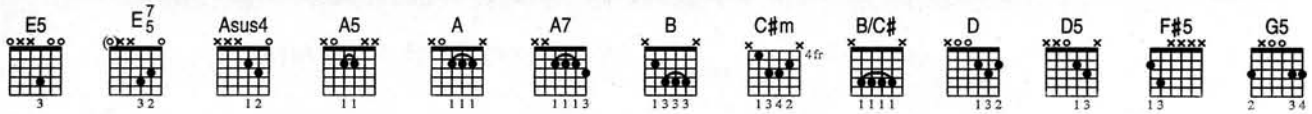
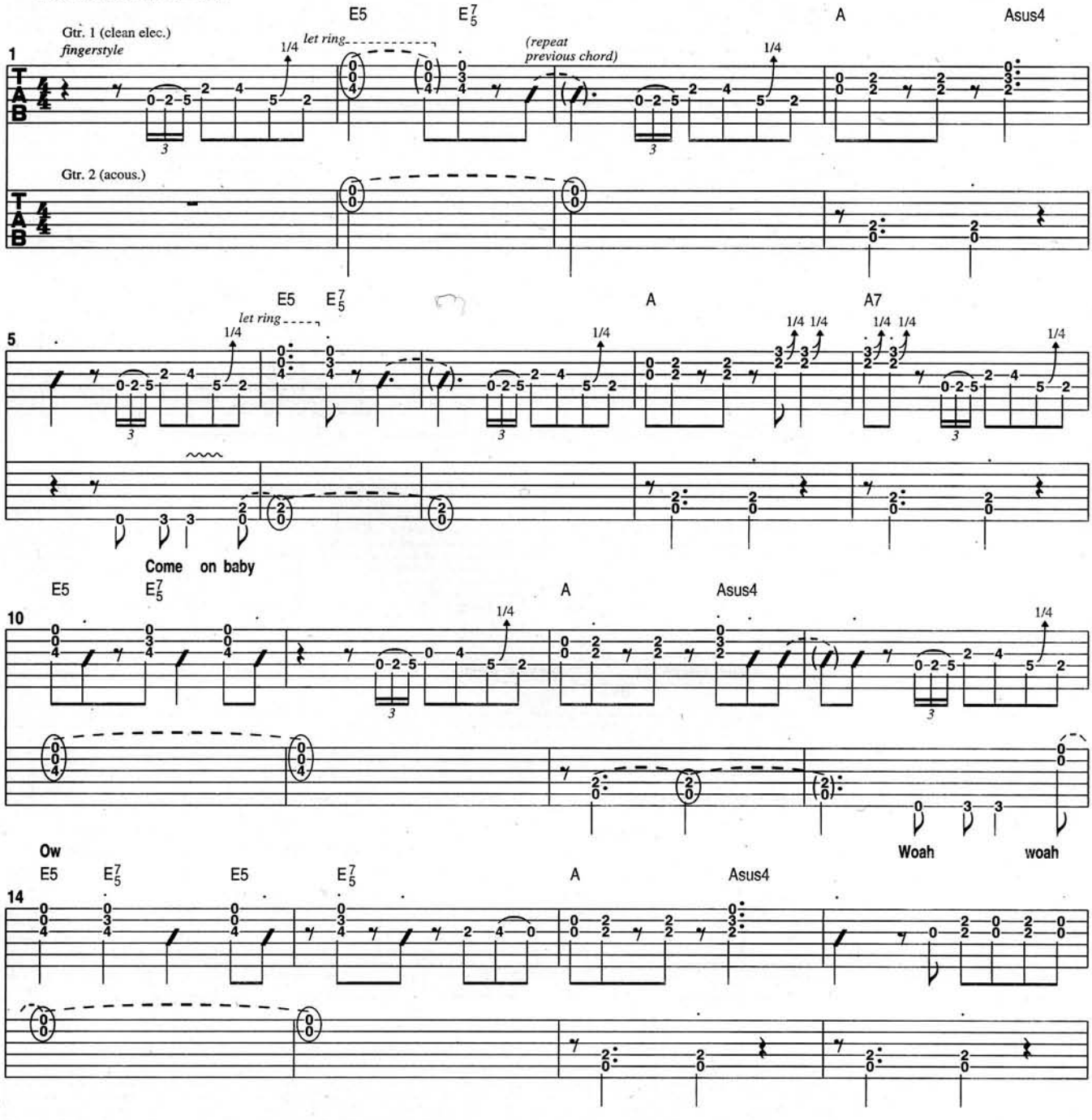
"FINISH WHAT YA STARTED" Van Halen

As heard on ***OU812*** (WARNER BROS.)

Words and Music by **Sammy Hagar, Edward Van Halen, Alex Van Halen and Michael Anthony** • Transcribed by **Jimmy Brown**



A **Intro** (0:00)

Moderate Rock ♩ = 129

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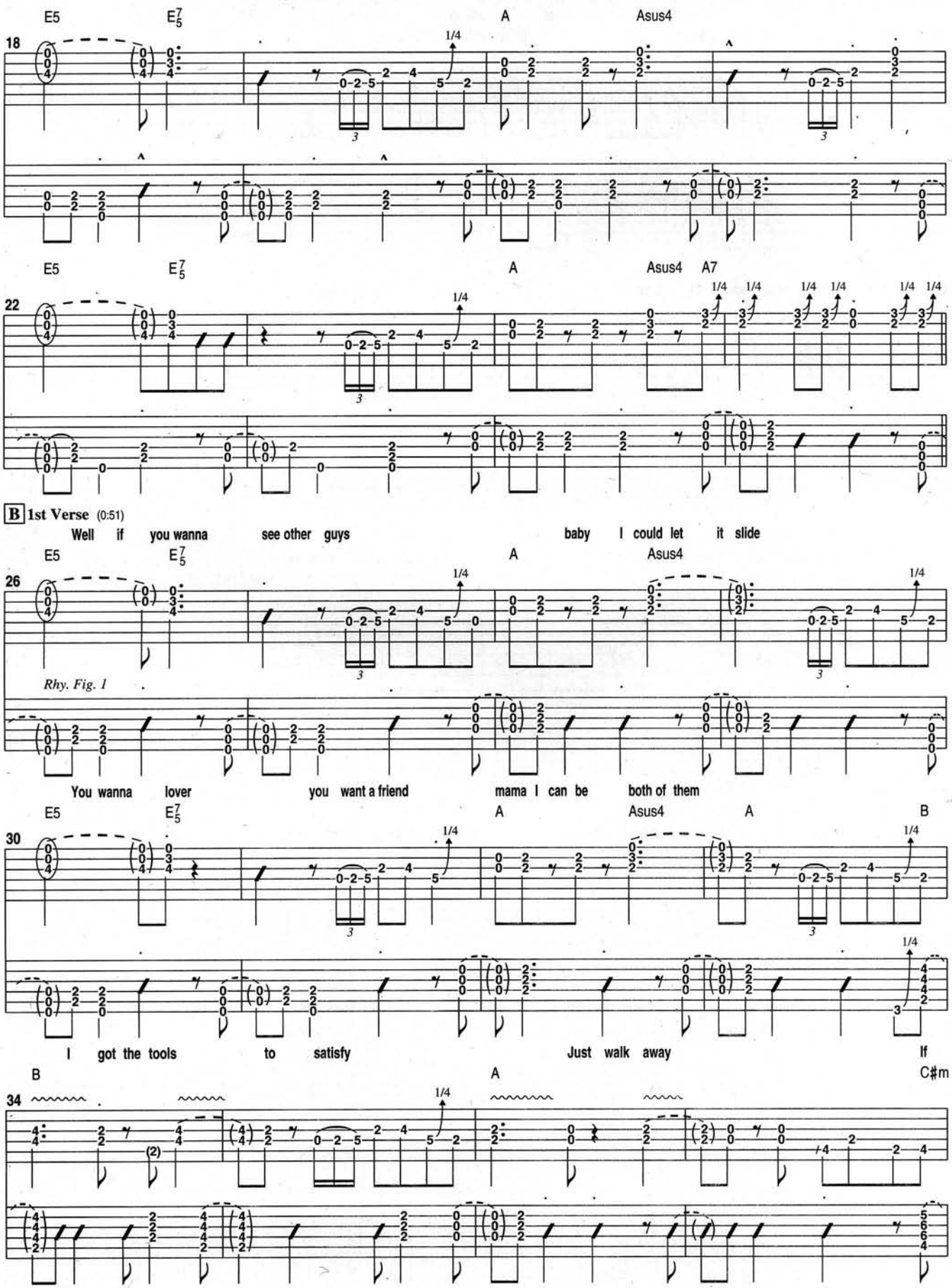
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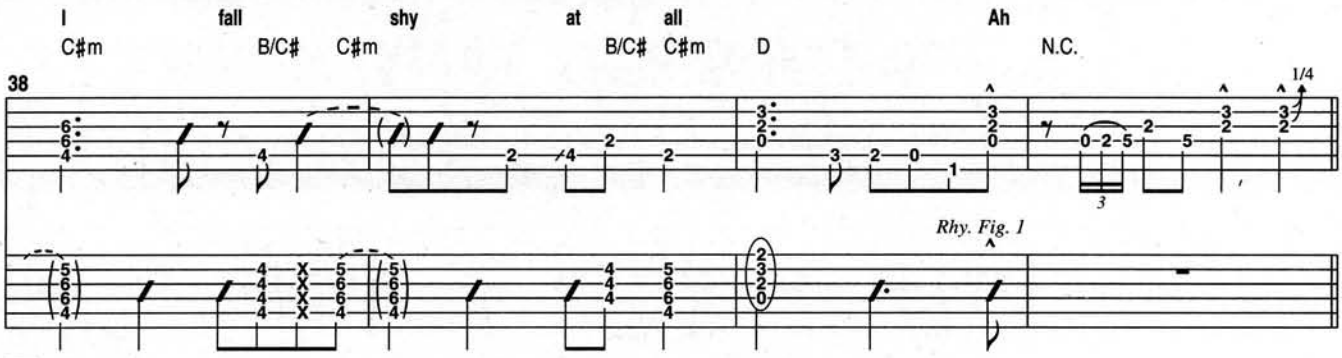
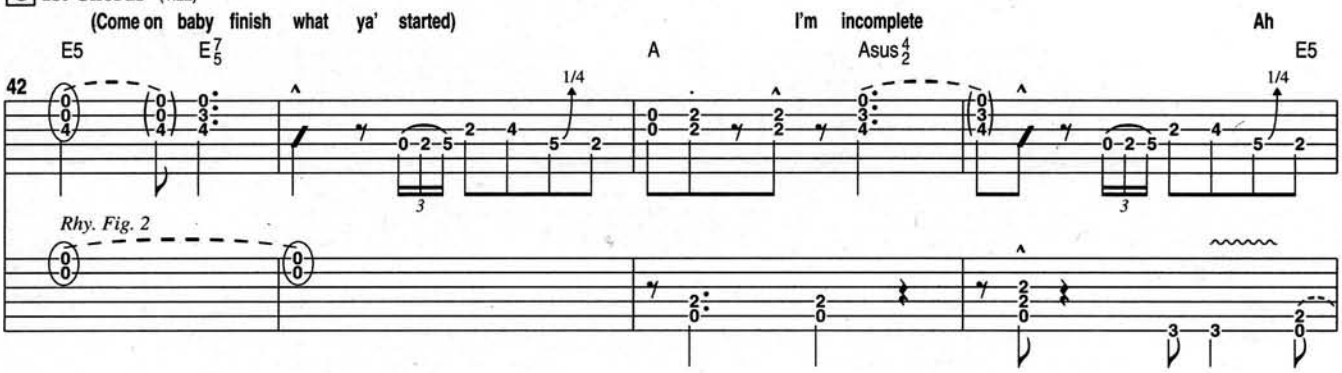
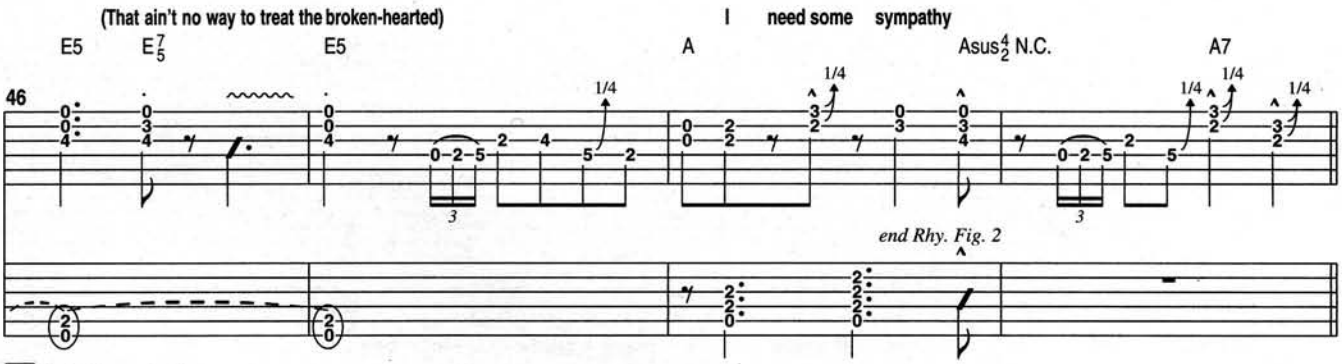
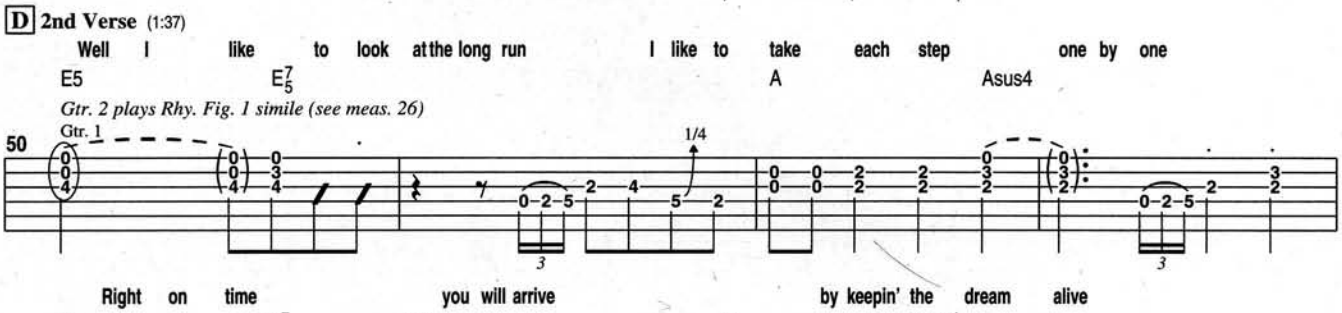


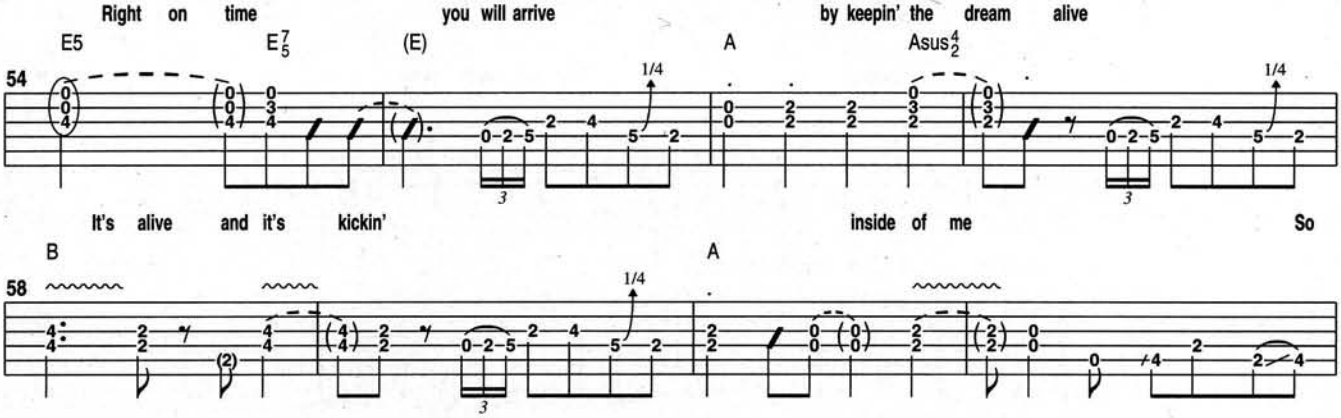
C **1st Chorus** (1:22)





D **2nd Verse** (1:37)





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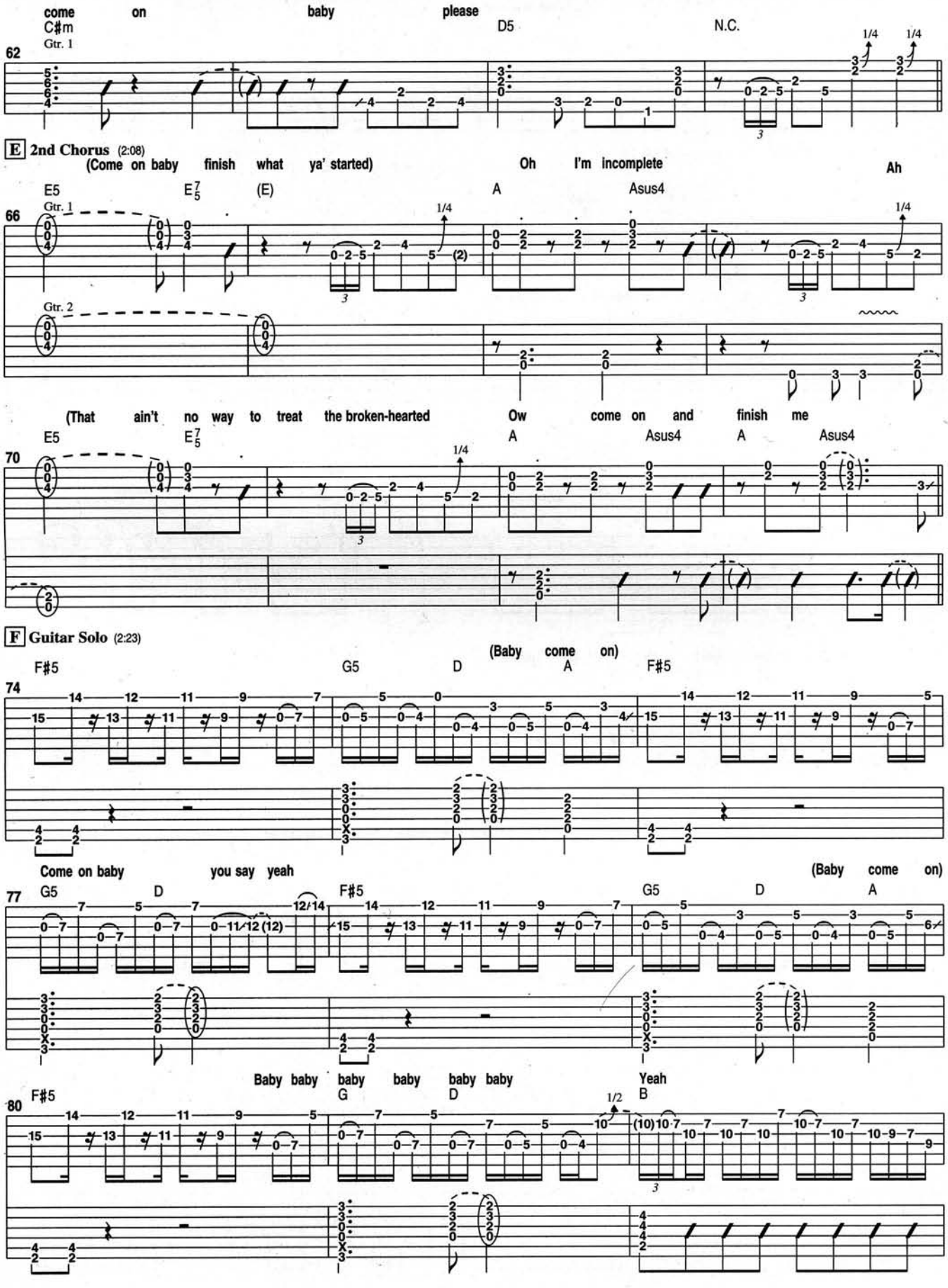
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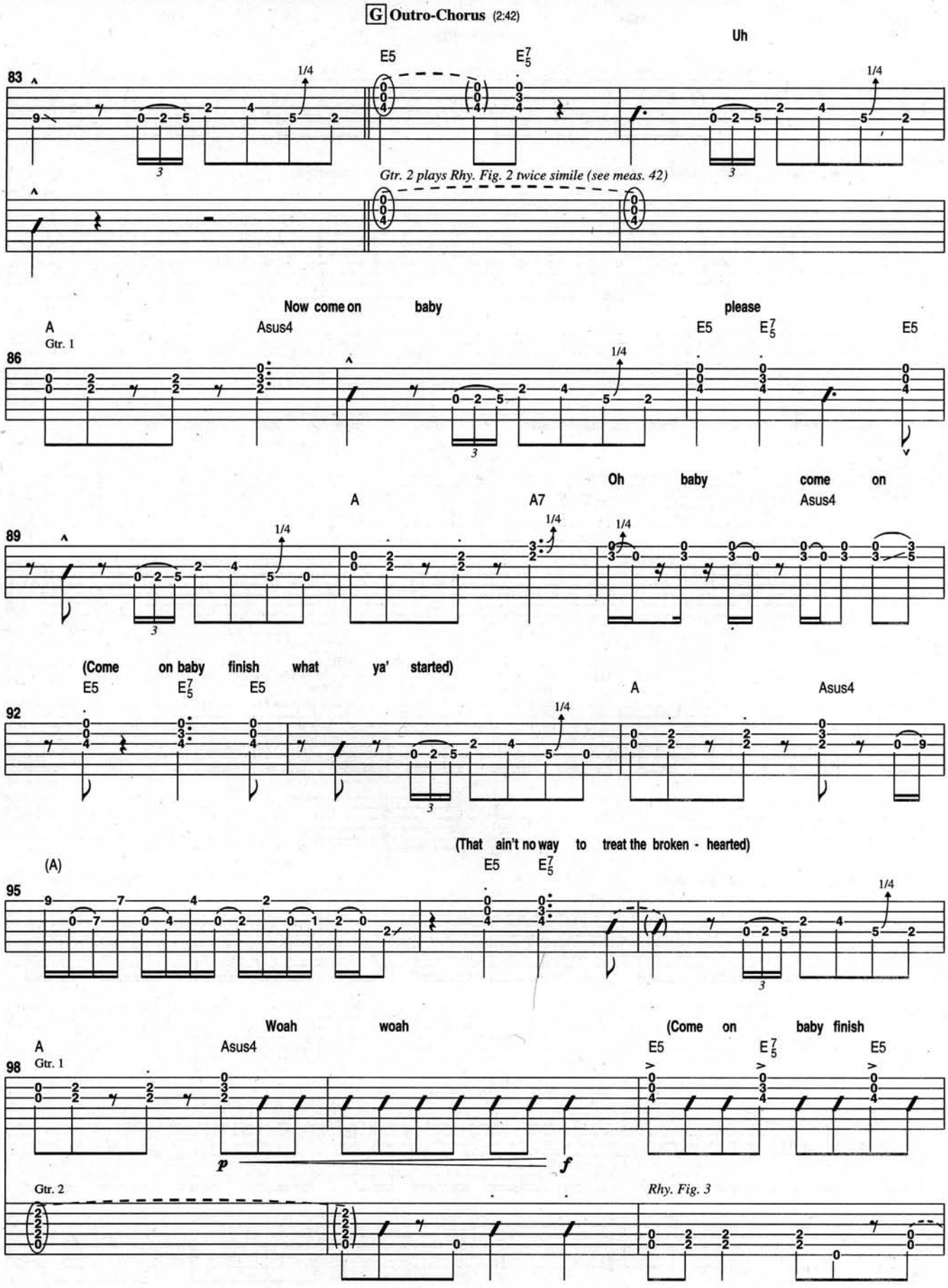
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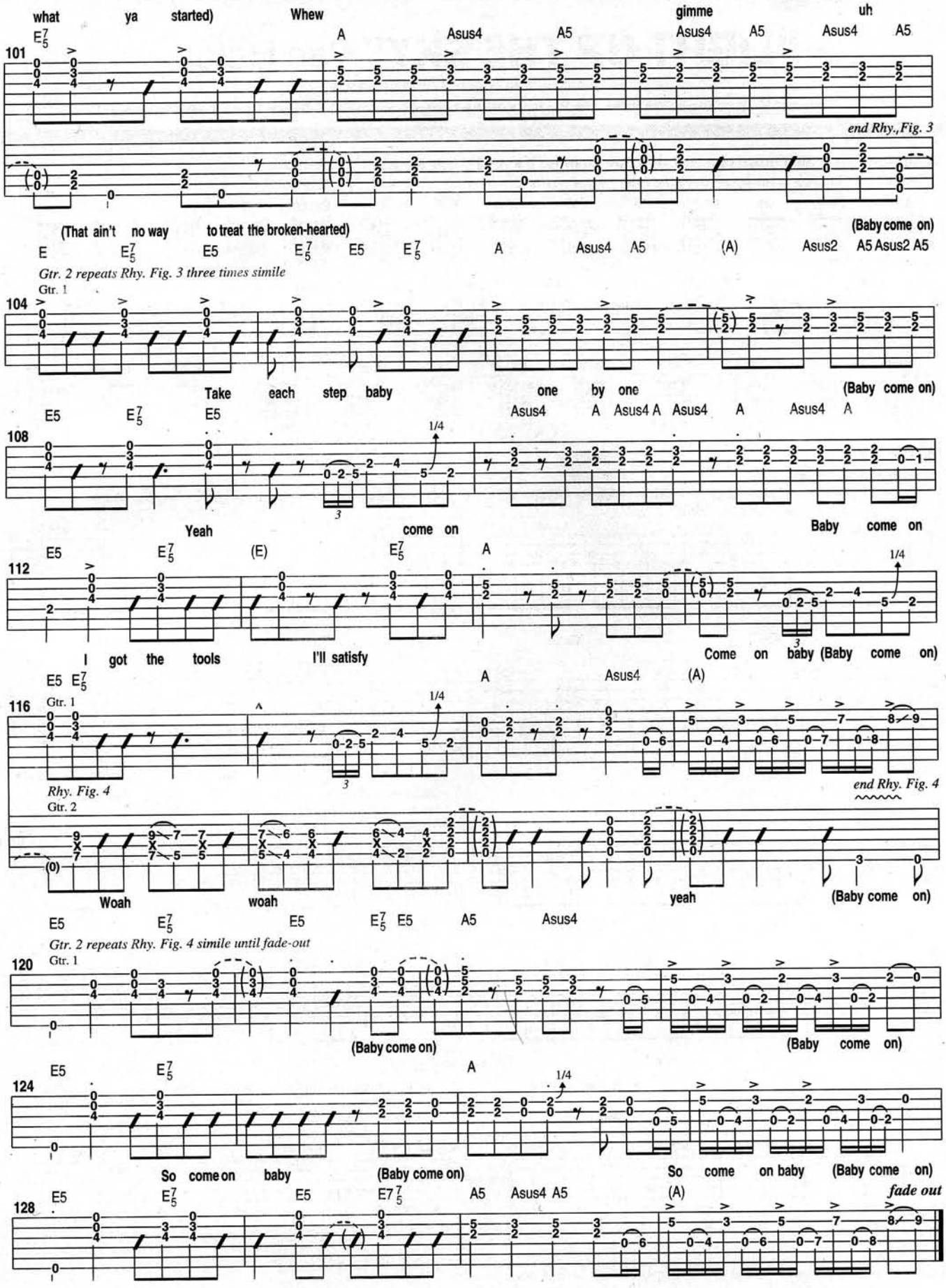

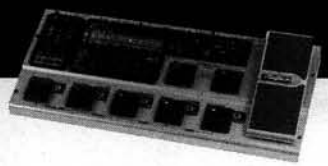
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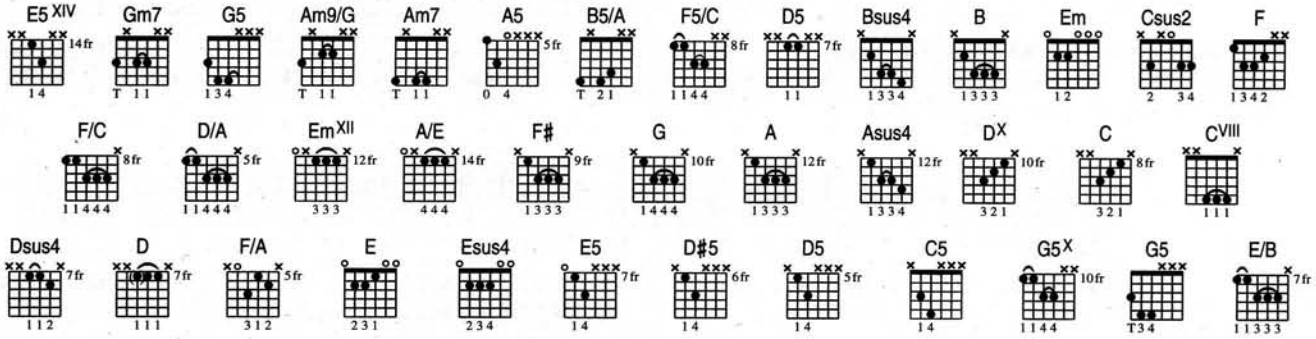
"LIGHT UP THE SKY" Van Halen

As heard on ***Van Halen II*** (WARNER BROS.)

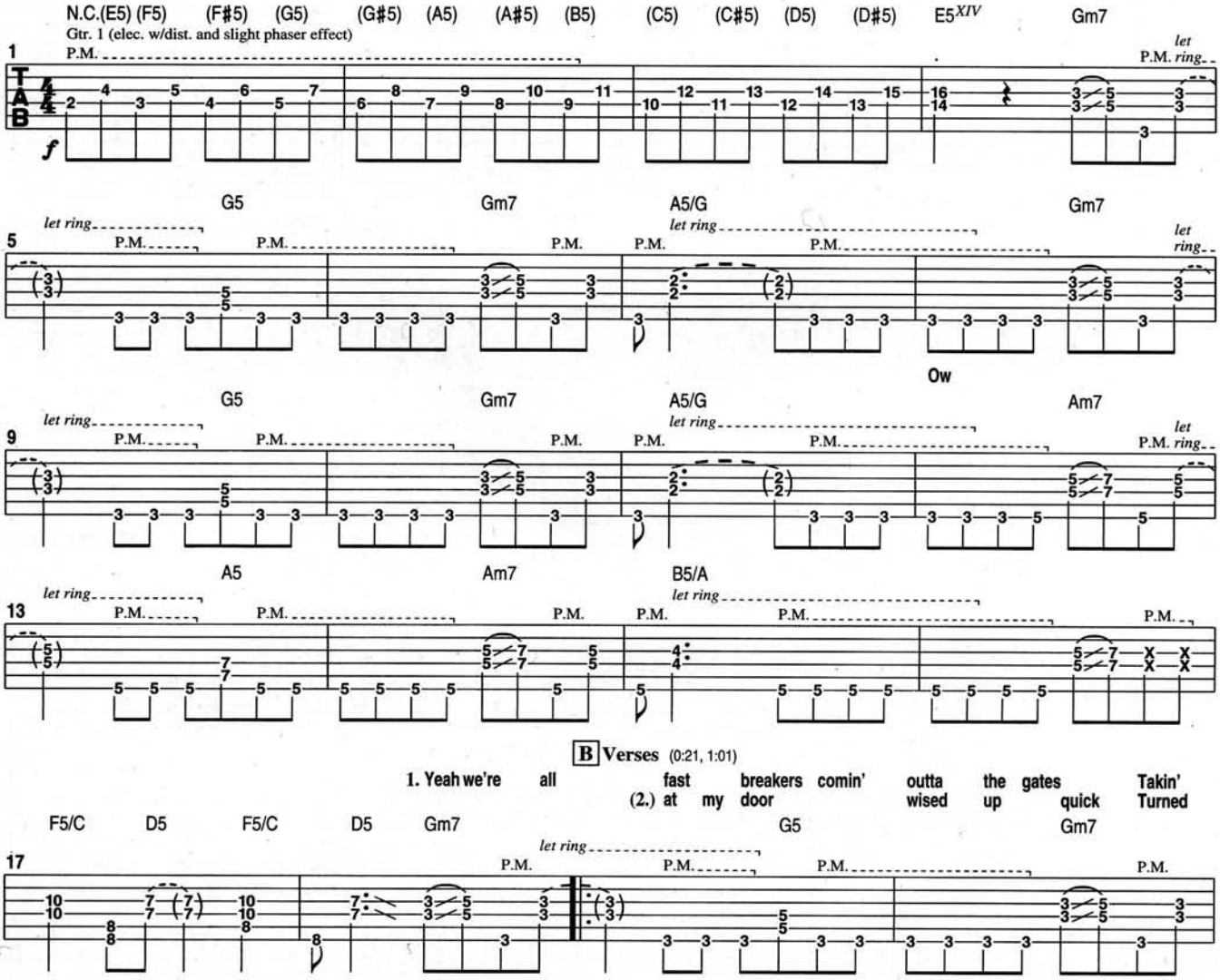
Words and Music by **Edward Van Halen, Alex Van Halen, Michael Anthony and David Lee Roth** • Transcribed by **Jeff Perrin**

All guitars are tuned down one half step (low to high: E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ B♭ E♭).
All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written.



A Intro (0:00)

Fast Rock ♩ = 196



B Verses (0:21, 1:01)

1. Yeah we're all fast breakers comin' outta the gates Takin'
(2.) at my door wised up quick Turned

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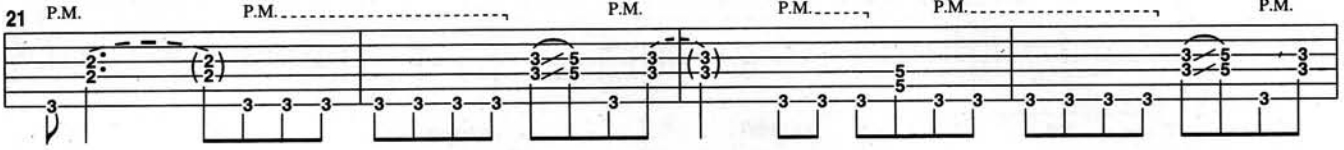
chances with a crash and burn — And there is a way with beauty but you never gave love
here and gone from on the go — Seen the old folks who come up short We're the

A5/G Gm7 G5 Gm7

let ring *let ring*

21 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.



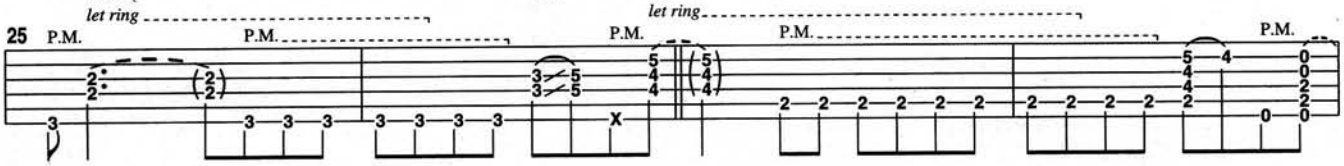
C Pre-Chorus (0:31, 1:11)

Cross the line where none return Oh — I watch my television Almost
pretty little kids who didn't want it no Oh — I had a crazy vision

A5/G Gm7 Bsus4 B Em

let ring *let ring*

25 P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M. P.M.

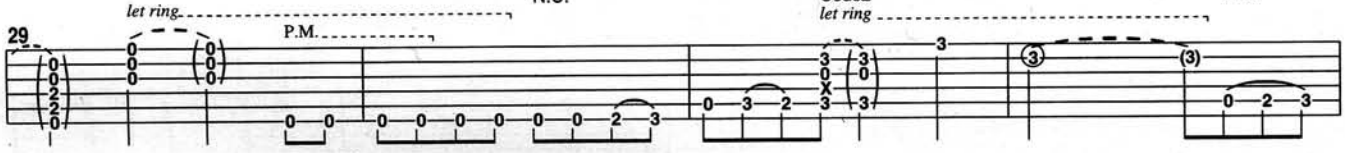


One I lost my mind It said "Open your eyes
can't deny and it said "Open my eyes

N.C. Csus2 N.C.

let ring *let ring*

29 P.M.

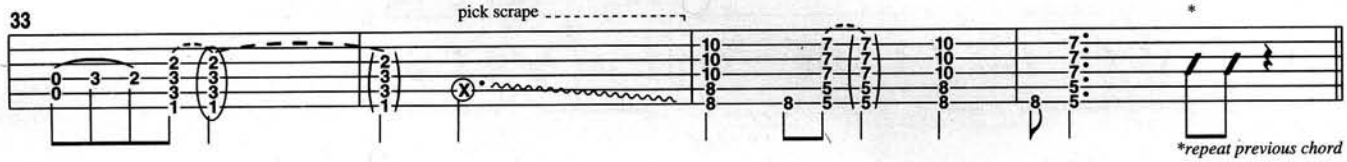


Leave it all behind"
Leave it all behind"

F N.C. F/C D/A F5 D/A

pick scrape

33

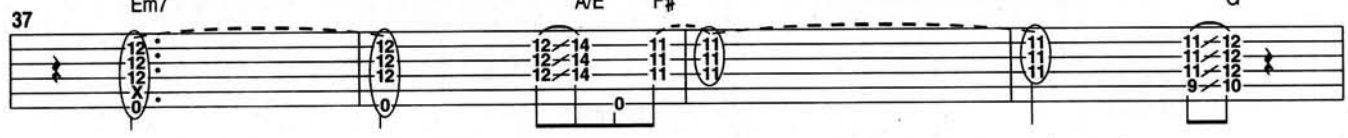


*repeat previous chord

D Chorus (0:43, 1:23)

I heard the wind a - whisperin' — Strong magic comin' on
I heard the wind a - whisperin' — Strong magic comin' on

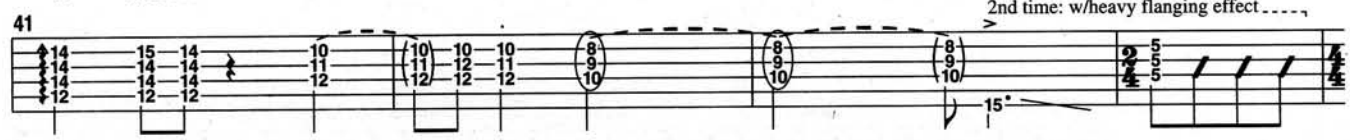
Em7 A/E F♯ G

37

They comin' out for sure
It's comin' out for sure

A Asus4 A D^X C N.C. C

2nd time: w/heavy flanging effect

41



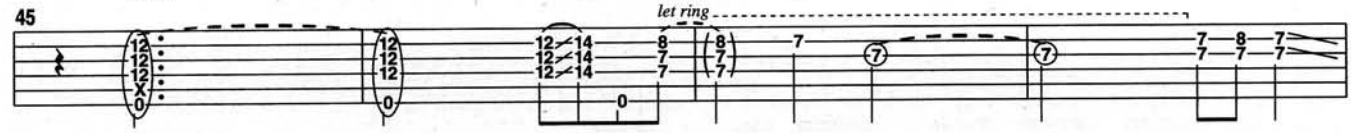
1.

Come see your children yeah they're lighting up the skies
Come see your children yeah they're

Em7 A/E Dsus4 D

let ring

45



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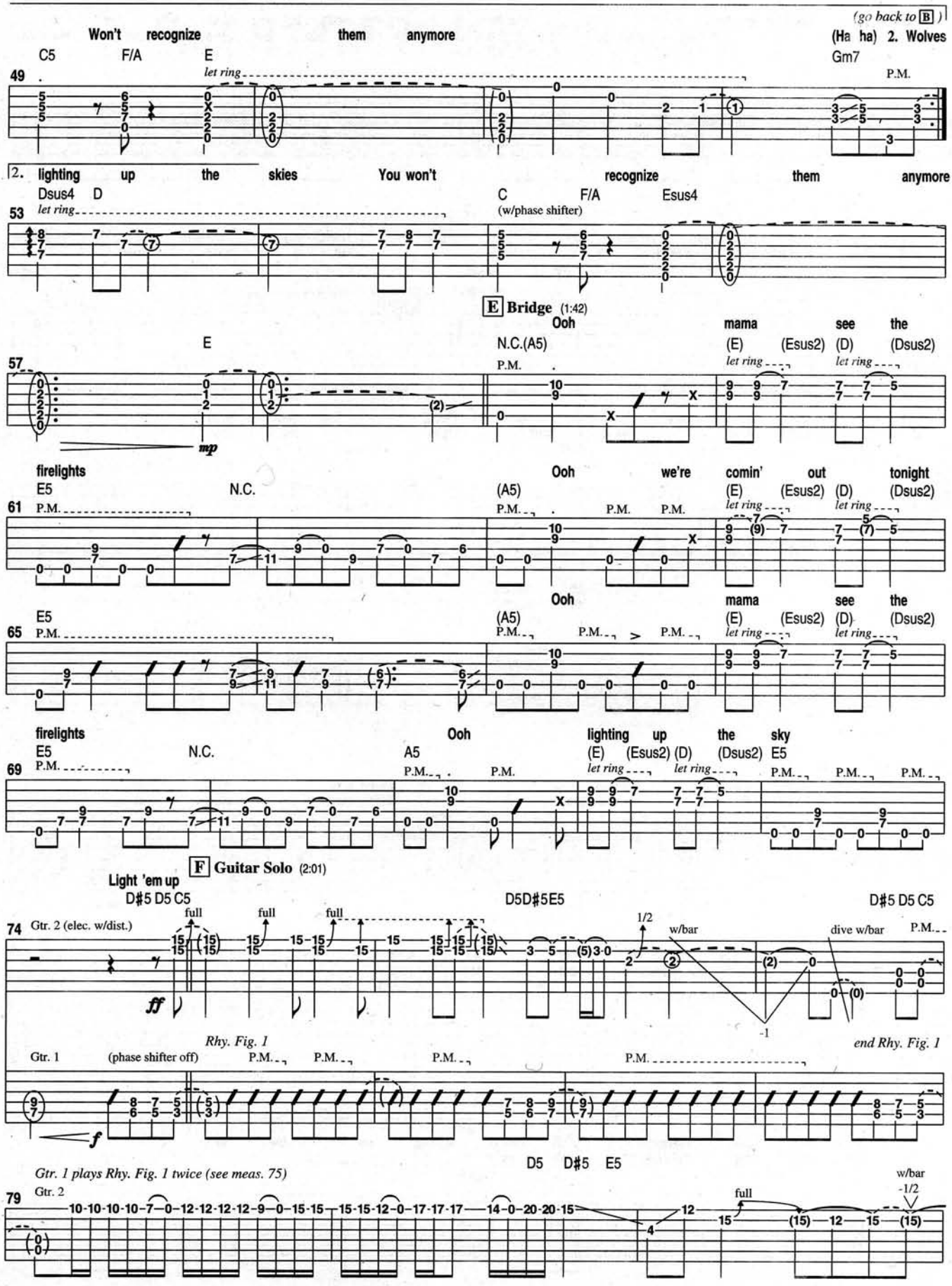
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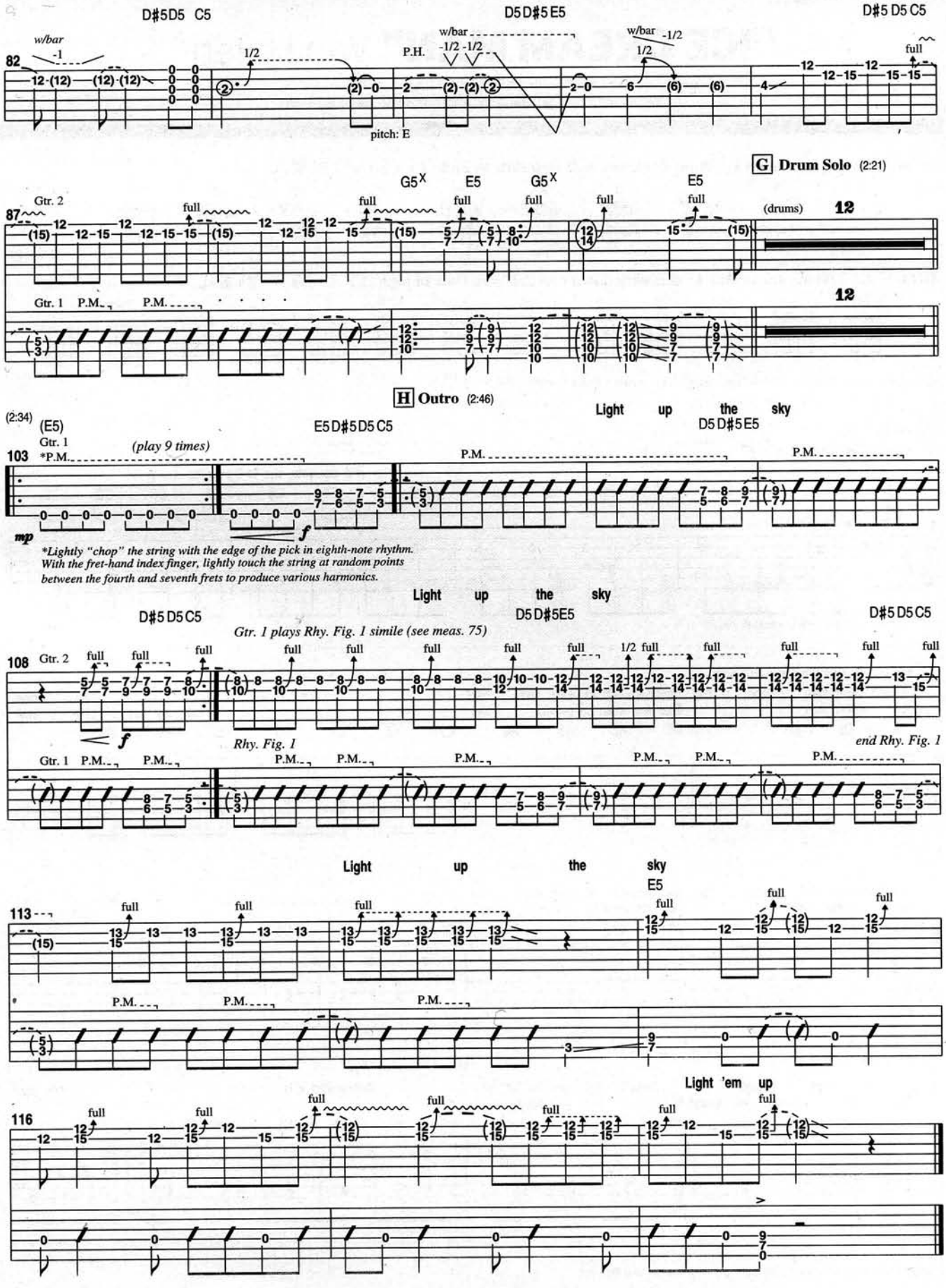

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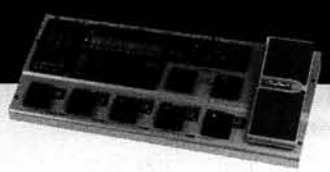
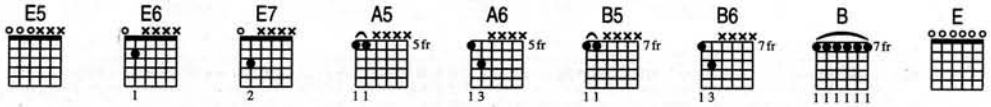


"ICE CREAM MAN" Van Halen

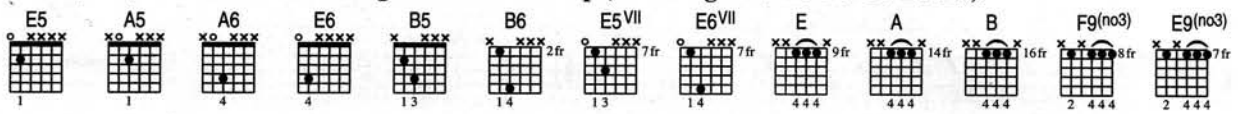
As heard on ***Van Halen*** (WARNER BROS.)

Words and Music by **John Brim** • Transcribed by **Dave Whitehill**

Acoustic guitar is in open E tuning down one half step (low to high: E♭ B♭ E♭ G B♭ E♭).



Gtrs. 1 and 2 (elec.) are in standard tuning down one half step (low to high: E♭ A♭ D♭ G♭ B♭ E♭).



All notes and chords sound one half step lower than written (key of E♭).

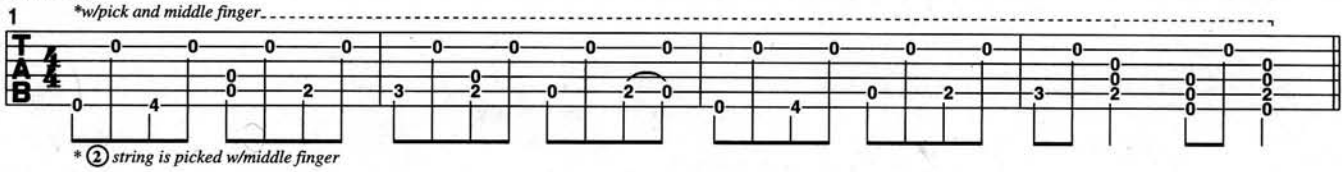
A **Intro** (0:00)

Fast Blues Shuffle ♩ = 173 (♫ = ♩ ♪)

N.C.(E) E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 N.C.(E) (I'll) dedicate one to the ladies E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 Now

Acous. Gtr.

1 *w/pick and middle finger



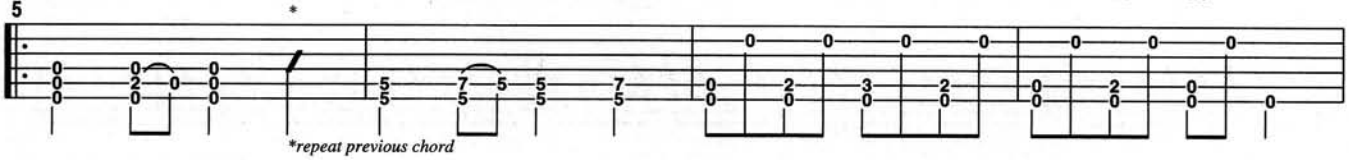
* ② string is picked w/middle finger

B **1st Verse and Chorus** (0:05, 0:22)

summertime's here babe You need somethin' to keep you cool
ice cream man Stop me when I'm passin' by
E5 E6 E5 A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 E5

Oh my my Ah now
I'm your

5 *

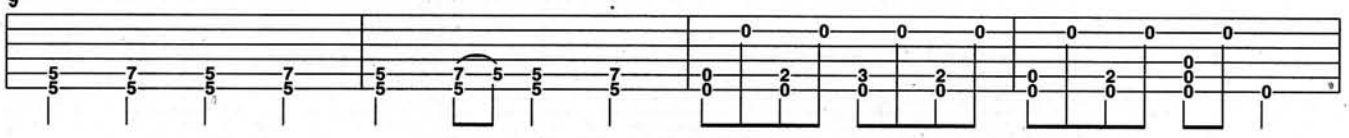


*repeat previous chord

summertime's here babe You need somethin' to keep you cool
ice cream man Stop me when I'm passin' by
A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6

Better look
See now

9

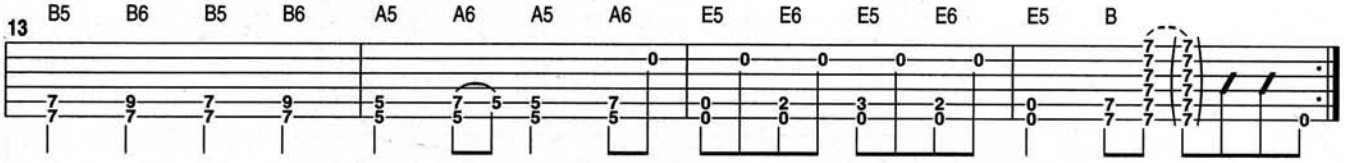


1.

out now though Dave's got somethin' for you
all my flavors are guaranteed to satisfy
B5 B6 B5 B6 A5 A6 A5 A6 E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 B

Tell ya what it is I'm your

13



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2.

C 2nd Verse (0:38)

Hold on a second baby I got good lemonade ah Dixie cups

E5 E6 E5 E6 E5 B E

17

All flavors and pushups too I'm your ice cream man baby Stop me when I'm passin' by

E N.C. A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5

21

See now all my flavors are guaranteed to satisfy

E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 E5 E6 B5 B6 B5 B6 A5 A6 A5 A6

25

D 3rd Verse (0:55)

Hold on One more Well I'm usually passin' by just about eleven o'clock

E5 E6 E5 E5 B E5 E6 E5 E6 A5 A6 A5 A6

Rhy. Fill 1

29

Uh huh I never stop I'm usually passin' by just around eleven o'clock

E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 E5 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6 A5 A6

33

And if you let me cool you one time you'll be my regular stop

E5 E6 E7 E6 E5 E6 E5 B5 B6 B5 B6 A5 A6 A5 A6

37

E 4th Verse (1:12)

Alright boys I got good lemonade ah Dixie cups

E5 E6 E E5 B E5

Acous. Gtr. plays Rhy. Fill 1 (see meas. 30)

Gtr. 1 (elec. w/dist.)

41

f

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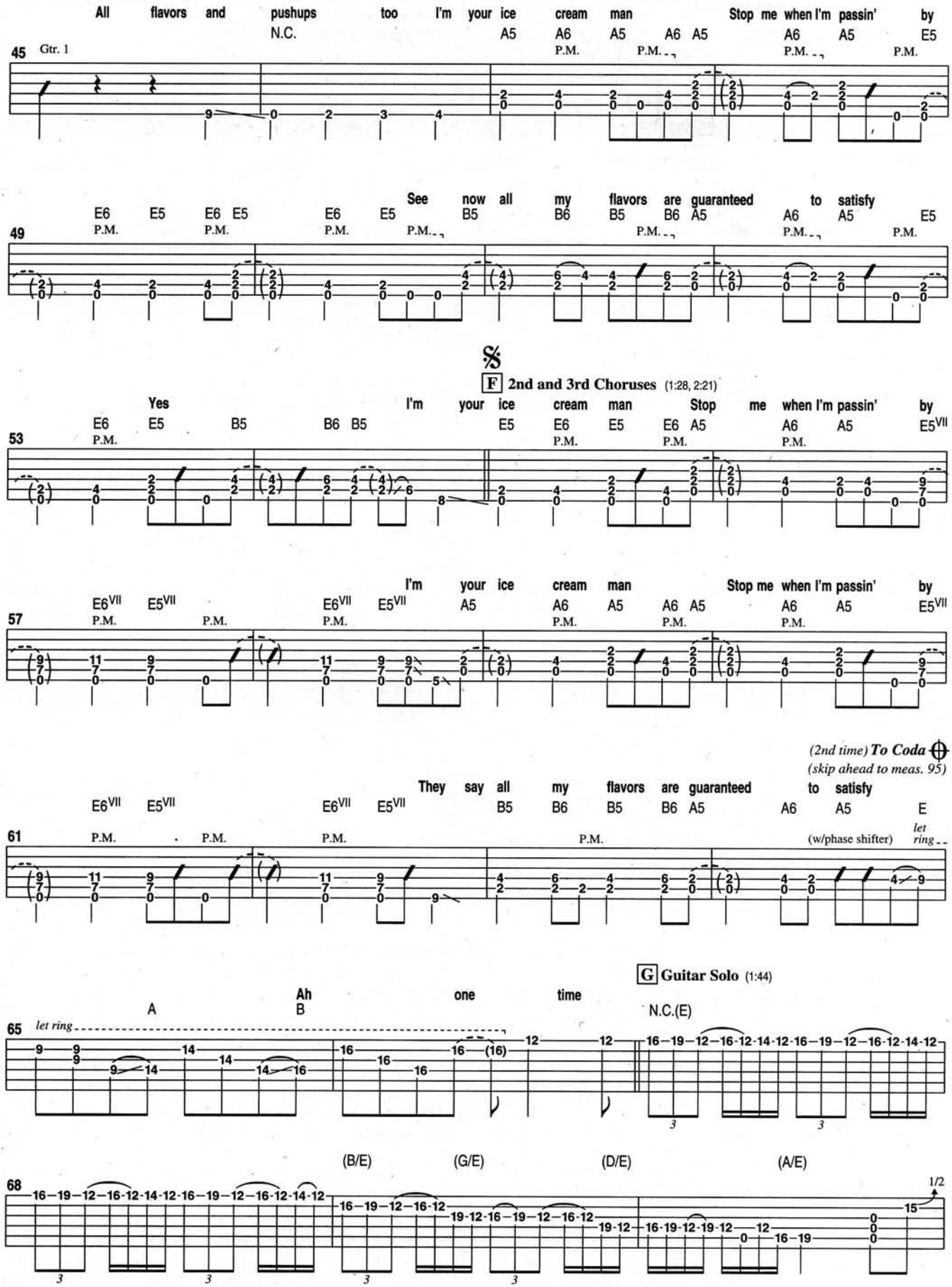
"ICE CREAM MAN"



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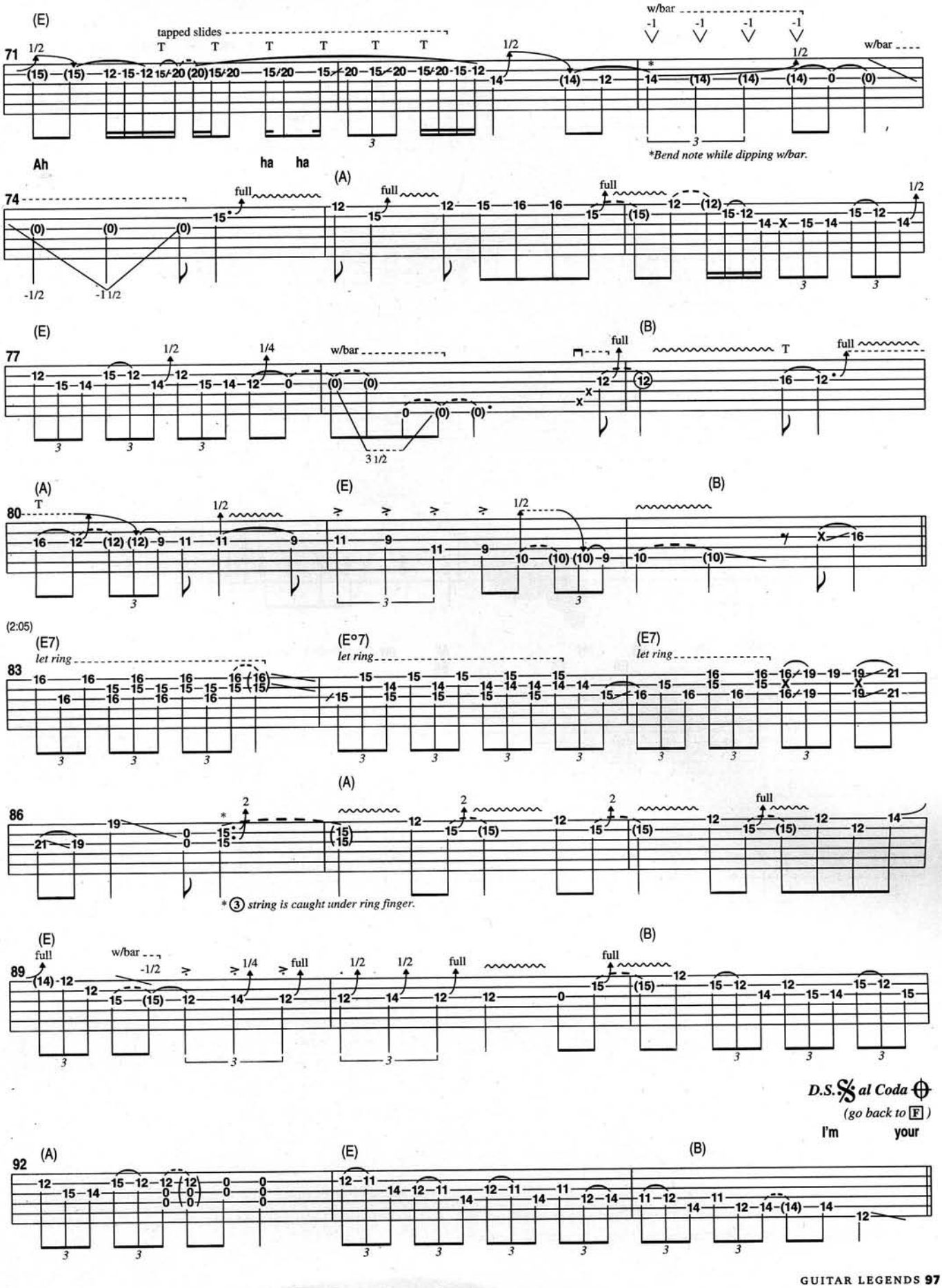

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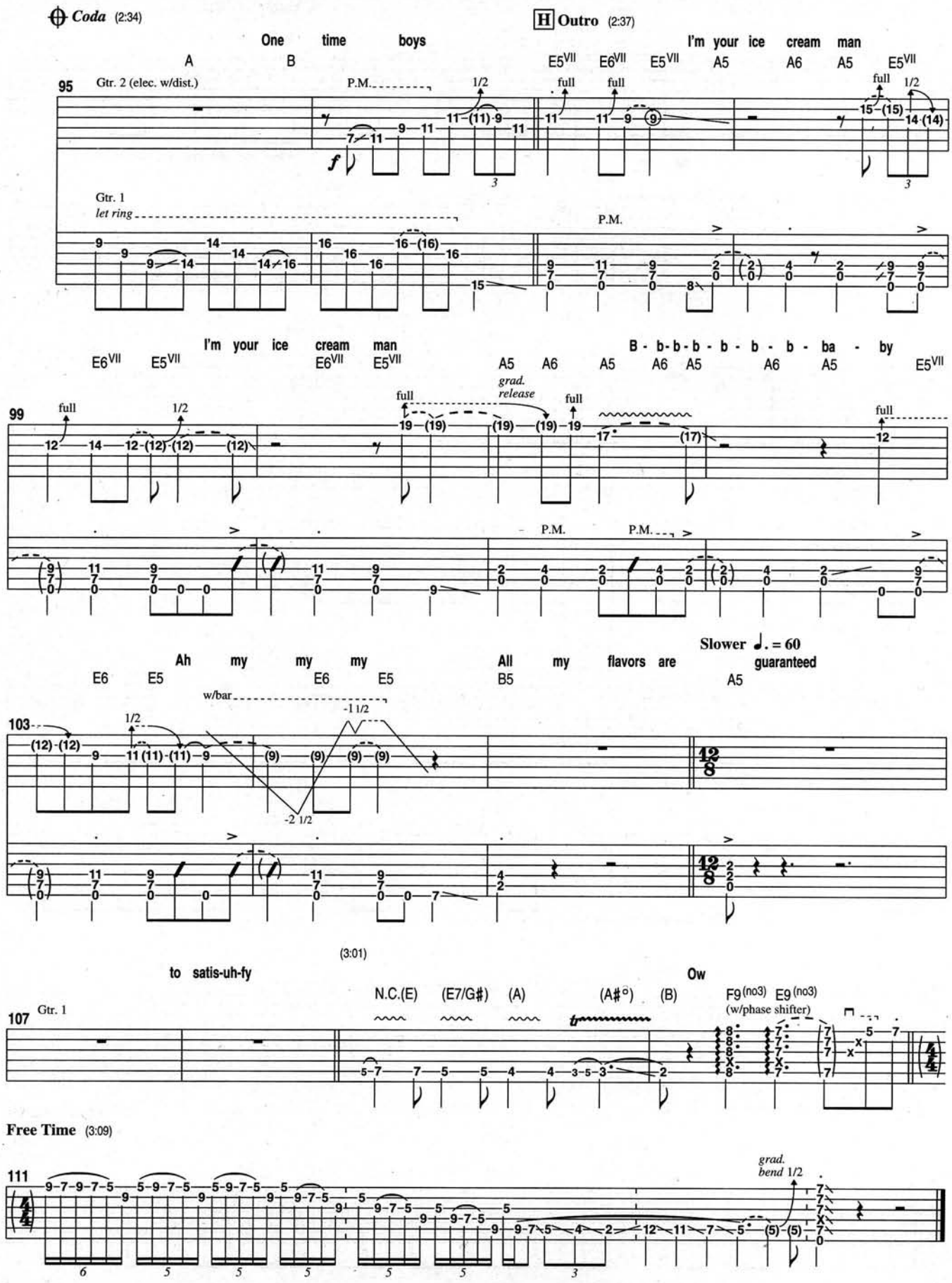
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